THE QUEEN OF SHEBA

PHINNEAS A. CRUTCH

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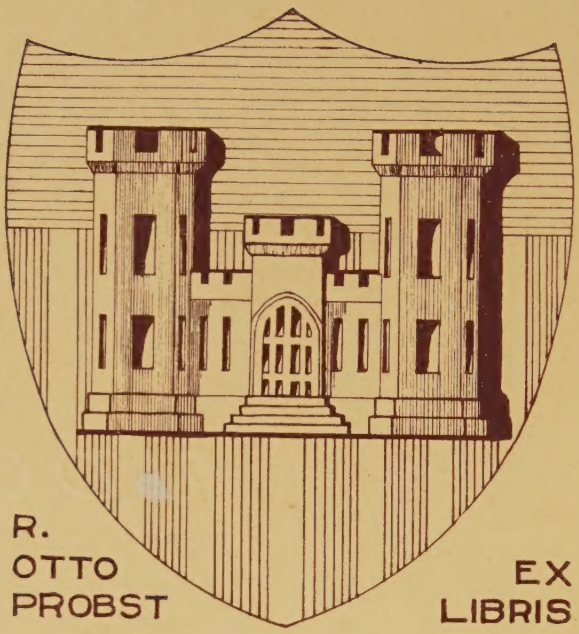

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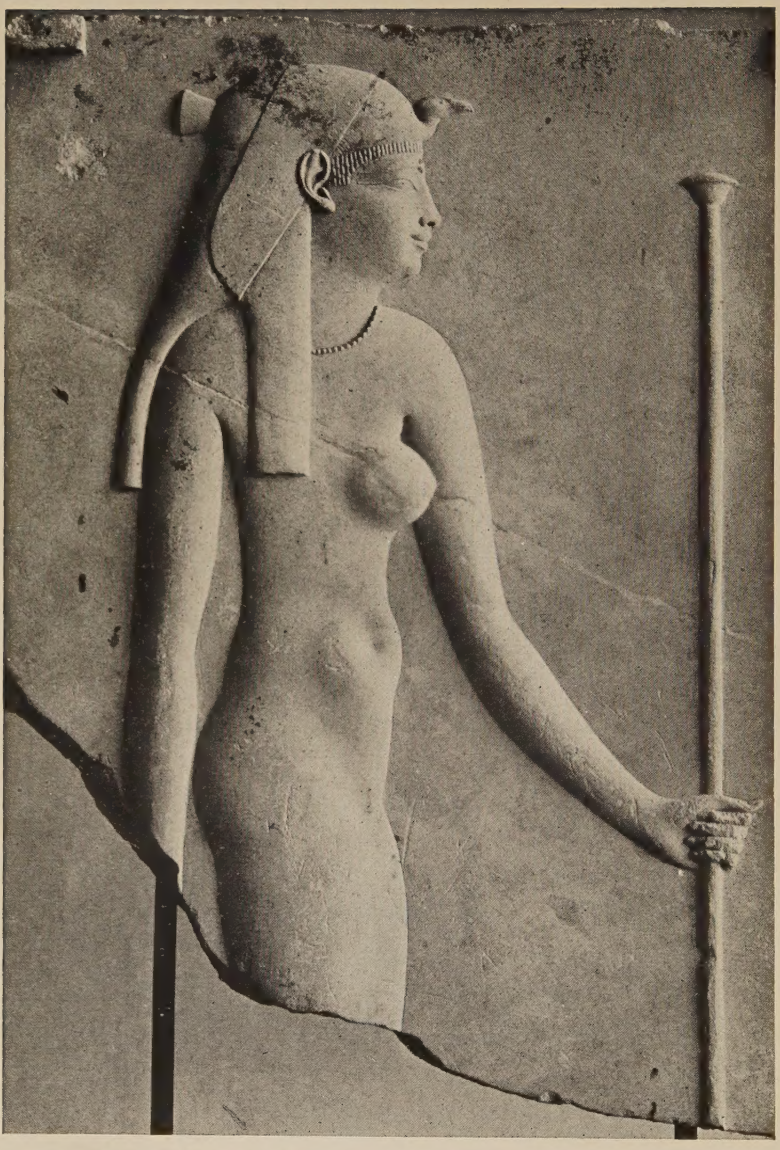

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THE QUEEN OF SHEBA

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HER LIFE AND TIMES

BY

PHINNEAS A. CRUTCH

B.A., M.A., F.P.A., S.O.S.

ILLUSTRATED

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To

C. R. H.

FOREWORD

Countless volumes, incunabula, brochures and miscellany, with which every student of history is intimately acquainted, have been issued concerning the more salient incidents of the life and reign of Balkis, Queen of Sheba.

One has only to speculate, as indeed one can scarcely abstain from doing in moments of fascinated leisure, upon this richly controversial subject, to call to mind at once such authoritative works as Professor Hornblower's *The Enigma of Sheba,* with its masterly discussions based on contemporary sources, in which he conclusively disposes of the distorted reports touching upon the Queen's accession; Gorton's *Secret Memoirs of the Court of Sheba,* which, in spite of a deplorable tendency on the author's part to accept canard for chronicle, nevertheless remains a monumental contribution of its kind to the bibliography of the period; Heimweh's scholarly monograph, *Zeitgenossen der Konigin Balkis,* an admirable study of the social and literary movements of her time; and Gaston Poteau's delightful *Voyages de la Reine de Saba,* which needs no recommendation other than its own charm and whimsicality of comment, even in less purely Sheban circles of research.

If, at so late a date, one presumes to offer an

additional treatise supplementing the foregoing, chosen at random from amid the mass of printed material inspired by this extraordinary reign, it is from a conviction, fathered by hope, that a wider survey of the time than is set forth in any of the more specialized existing documents will be indulgently received—and particularly by that great reading body of the public which is ever more deeply concerned with the human frailties of a career than with its statecraft, more warmly stirred by a glimpse of unrecorded impulse than by the graven monuments of staid deliberation, more closely sympathetic to the personal record of advancing years than to the cold chronology of edicts.

It is in this spirit, therefore, a spirit of lenient toleration, of mild reserve in the face of temptatious criticism, of restrained veracity untouched by any gossipry, claver, or reportage, that one approaches the life and age of Balkis, Queen of Sheba—she who was born before her time and remained to outlive her day, in whom the East and the West were met and the lioness couchant with the ewe, whose way was paved with well-intentioned errancy, for whom no reticence was too forbidding, no curiosity too shameless, no new departure too

prodigal of candlelight. She, who was but a child, and yet who stood alone in the midst of bearded men, and, with many innocent questions, brought them to their separate ends.

La petite Balkis, as Gaston Poteau so quaintly puts it . . .

P. A. C.

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"Every inch of the way a Queen."

Anonymous.

THE QUEEN OF SHEBA

THE QUEEN OF SHEBA

CHAPTER I

EAST OF SUEZ

1

The first millennium, old style, dawned lugubriously for Sheba.

For more than three centuries she had seen the glory of the coming of a hundred lords. When it was not Rameses II it was Menephthah. When it was not Menephthah it was the Children of Israel. In Assyria, no sooner was Shalmaneser laid with his uncles and his aunts than Tiglathpileser I was afoot. And after him Ashurnazirpal. And after them both, Merdukzer and Eulmashshakinshum, the Babylonians. Nearer home, the Kings of Ma'in were a thorn in the flesh, a pebble in the shoe, a mote in the eye. More recently, too, the power of Tyre was risen to be a nightmare on the face of the waters.

Sheba was become the cockpit of Arabia.

2

Now suddenly the silence of an uneasy peace enveloped the land.

The greater powers to the northeast, Assyria and Babylon, were come to terms, a precarious truce, fraught with the dust clouds of gathering chariots. Ashurkirbi and Nabumukinpal eyed one another sourly from their neighboring capitals and exchanged costly gifts, consisting for the most part of the identical ivory, apes and peacocks which their fathers had exchanged before them.

In Egypt the Pharaoh was poorly, and kept to his fleshpots.

Up in Israel, Saul was dead, and David drew near to his end, content to marvel at the wisdom of the youth Solomon, his son, or to sit in the gate rehearsing the days of the siege, when the city of Jerusalem was taken from the Jebusites. This was the old King's favorite anecdote, now that the incidents of his encounter with Goliath had begun to pale.

"And," he would chuckle, "they cried that the blind and the lame would be enough to keep me out. And I cried, Is that so?—Go up the drain into the midst of the city and turn on those blind and lame ones and smite them, foot and mouth!" [1]

It was on one of these occasions that Solomon made his famous *bon mot,* often erroneously attributed to Jeroboam.

[1] Hebron Papyrus, ch. 49, v. 6.

"It's a long drain that has no turning." [1]

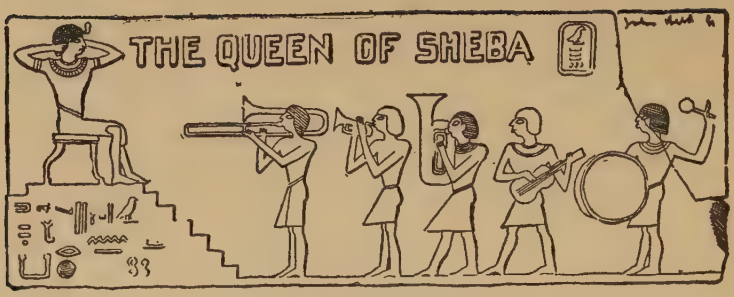
Tyre, Mistress of the Sea, manned her fearless twin-ruddered ships for the long journey to Punt and Ophir, and pushed forth boldly on many an adventurous keel into the Unknown Ocean. It had hitherto always been supposed that the earth was shaped like a saucer, rimmed with void, floating under a dome of intermittently luminous revolving bodies. But with each returning argosy it became increasingly patent that the earth was flat, stretching boundlessly hither and yon, interspersed with rolling waters.

True, this great discovery was not admitted by the old school without due persecution. The great navigator, Hanno the Elder, was haled before the Suffetes of the Port of Tyre and forced to recant, under penalty of being fed to the sea lions. Under the circumstances he surrendered to their prejudice, but the gruff old salt was none the less convinced of the validity of his claim.

"It may seem curved to you and me," he grumbled under his breath as he left the council chamber, "but it's just as flat as it used to be—and if this be sacrilege make the most of it!" [2]

[1] *Ibid.*, ch. 49, v. 17.

[2] *Memoirs of Hanno the Elder*, ch. 8, p. 209.



And, little by little, the new cartography was generally adopted, even though the phraseology of charter-parties still clung to the old exemption clauses—"the Trident of Neptune, the Perils of the Rim and the Acts of Hostile Deities"—so that the water borne commerce of Tyre was greatly exalted over that of other nations who still cautiously forbore to tempt disaster at what they supposed to be the edge of the world.

This, as may be imagined, proved a source of great profit to the Tyrians, who set about with all their national cunning to encourage this state of mind among their neighbors, the while they themselves were rapidly expanding their new-found commercial empire, over which it was their proud boast that the shades of night never fell.

3

To the north and west, in Ma'in, the aged Shush sat rooted to the throne.

Descended from the macrobian Patriarch Fathers, rehearsing his ancestry on both sides to the original settlers of Arabia who had migrated with the Ark, this venerable, blue-nosed monarch was now two hundred and forty-six years old. As Lepage so aptly characterises him:

"He was long-headed, long-winded and long-lived." [1]

The old ruler's great-great-grandson, the Heir Apparent, was ninety-four. Six hundred and seventy-eight nephews, nieces and other miscellaneous relations gathered annually around his board on the occasion of his birthday, and for each one he had a pet name which never escaped his memory, and a special tidbit done up in a mother-of-pearl box incrusted with emeralds.[2]

In his now far distant youth, by reason of his constant disturbance of the security of adjacent peoples, Shush had earned for himself the title of Offender of the Peace. In all Araby, surely, no monarch ever played the role of spear shaker and shield pounder more obstreperously and more inopportunely than this young jackanapes during the first hundred and fifty years of his reign.

Sprung from a long line of warrior forbears, the

[1] Trouthook, in his fascinating *Street Cries and Epithets of Old Ma'in,* is of the opinion that the catchword Long live the King had its inception during this reign, but Popover and Björn both quarrel with this view, voicing the theory that the phrase in its original form was How long the King lives. Both renderings, however, occur in Tortoni.

[2] It is to this habit of his that Steinkopf traces the custom of distributing portions of cake at later marriage ceremonies, although, as he points out, the quality of the containers rapidly deteriorated.

militaristic atmosphere of his early environment, all the ruthless tradition of his ancestors, so well expressed in the arrogant motto of his house, *"With Might and Ma'in,"* all the abject sycophancy of Mainim historians, seem to have gone to the young man's head. The archives of Sheba, and of Babylon and Tyre, are full of references to his hot-tempered trumpetings, his bull-headed vociferations, his fastuous, not to say fatuous, cudgelry.

No mess of pottage so thick but he must smear himself with it up to the elbows, no kettle of fish so boiling but he must burn his fingers at it, no diplomatic dish so delicate but he must stamp his feet in it, spatter the gravy where it might.

> "Young King Shush is a merry young smelt,
> And a merry young smelt is he;
> He calls for his sword and he calls for his belt,
> And he calls for his chariots three. . . ."

so they sang disrespectfully of him in a score of capitals.

He was the despair of his ministers, who found themselves obliged to mitigate the crudities of his ill-considered pronouncements, as in the case of the famous letter of condolence to Goliath's widow; but, it must be said, the idol of his people, who re-

veled in the gaiety which their handsome, headstrong prince contributed to the family of nations.

Indeed, his fondness for posturing in the international limelight led him to extraordinary lengths, in which his sense of the dramatic entirely obliterated whatever instincts of good taste may have been his portion. He seems to have been utterly devoid of any sense of humor.

At home, among other unrelated occupations, he tried his hand in turn at pottery making, mural inscription, sarcophagus painting, musical and poetic composition, peacock farming, ventriloquism, and the manufacture of jewelry. The little mother-of-pearl boxes incrusted with emeralds with which he was wont to gladden the eye of his guests were all the product of the royal factory. So great was the pride of craftsmanship which he lavished upon these mementos that any expression of disparagement on the part of the recipient would have been fatally ill-advised.

"At least," his grandmother said one day, "a box from his hand is worth two on the ear!"

He never spoke to her again. On her deathbed, at the foot of which he was obliged to show himself for a moment, she smiled at him whimsically and remarked:

"A box for everything, and everything in its box!" [1]

His hankering for statuary, and his passion for having himself pictured on camelback were bywords in the kingdom. The walls of his summer palace at Yathil were enriched with four hundred and ninety-two frescoes of himself in as many hippic poses, and in his pleasure gardens there was scarcely room to turn amid the marble effigies of his changing moods.

"The majority of monarchs," his prime minister remarked on one occasion, "busy themselves with statutes. This one is only occupied with statues."

To which a quick-witted courtier added that the description fitted to a T.

It is in his more public manifestations, however, that he appeared to the least advantage. Outhouse says of his famous journey to Ethiopia and Egypt that ". . . he comported himself in each locality in a manner calculated to scandalise his hosts and startle the *polloi*. In Ethiopia he was more Ethiopian than the Ethiopians, which was saying a great deal, going about in leopard skins and feathered head-dresses, followed by a bevy of lionesses. Before the Pyramid of Ghizeh he burst

[1] Lepage, *Le Roi Shush Quint*, ch. 3, p. 102.

into tears, overcome, as he said, by the sight of such quantities of stone. At Thebes he took the Sacred Bull by the horns, and conducted a violent flirtation with Aïda, one of the Queen's slaves. . . ."

4

Now, after more than two hundred years, he was known as the Sick Man of Arabia.

He was no longer young. He was no longer handsome. He was grown enormously fat, so that he had to be carried everywhere in a specially constructed litter, pendulous and jiggly.

". . . *comme une montagne de blancmange,*" as Lepage has it.

Untold fortunes in jewelry were buried in overlapping folds of flesh upon his person, in the form of rings and bracelets which had vanished from view decades before. Not a hair remained upon his scalp, which was yellow and sere like an ancient leaf, and the loose ends of his tremendously long beard were frayed and soiled from much trampling underfoot. He was utterly toothless, blobber-lipped, blind in one eye, and deaf as the cedars of Lebanon. The ravages of care, time and disease had left their imprint upon his cheek, wrinkled and

brown like the skin of a venerable date, and his gangrelous limbs staggered under the load of years which weighed down upon his aduncous shoulders.

In spite of which he remained, within certain limitations, in full possession of his faculties, keen-witted, sharp-tongued, and nimble-fingered in the matter of mother-of-pearl boxes. His statues, his portraits and his dramatic gestures were an ever present source of delight to him; and through his one good eye he looked out across his borders and into the pleasant land of Sheba, and mulled over the prospect, biding his time.

A portentous old man, whose grandniece had been the mother of the present King of Sheba.

5

And within the borders of Sheba a precarious state of affairs prevailed.

The grandniece of the King of Ma'in had ruled as Queen Consort in Sheba for exactly three and one half days, two and three quarters days longer than her predecessor. Only in her case the demise was shared by her husband, as a result of one of those palace insurrections which do so much to brighten the otherwise drab annals of the Court of Sheba during that era.

Her son, Jehaz, born while she was yet Crown Princess of Sheba, a position which she occupied, off and on, for thirty-nine years, ascended the steps of the throne from which the traces of the late unpleasantness had scarcely evaporated, and endeared himself at once to his subjects, great lovers as they were of swiftly administered justice, by putting to death in the public square of his capital two hundred and forty-six participants in the recent insurrection, to say nothing of six hundred and eighty-two innocent bystanders who had purchased coigns of vantage at the execution for an extravagant sum from the speculators.

The message received from Shush on this occasion was characteristic.

"Faster and bloodier," he wrote.[1]

The streets of Marib ran with gore.

Jehaz, in a frenzy of filial devotion, went slightly insane. Gentle and well-mannered, a disciple of culture and a patron of the arts, comely and lovable, he suffered from uncontrollable paroxysms of homicidal mania which kept his court in a perpetual flutter. As Talmud says:

"A summons to the royal presence was always fraught with a certain piquancy. One took one's

[1] Shenanikin, *Mirrors of Marib,* ch. 1, p. 2.

shoes in one hand and one's life in the other on such occasions."

When the fit was upon him nothing seemed to soothe the royal derangement except the loud beating of drums, the clashing of cymbals and the staccato whining of wind instruments. [1]

Gorton states that ". . . at times when the King's eyelids began to flutter, an unfailing symptom of approaching dementia, a perfect cacophony of conflicting sounds poured forth from the palace, not only as a result of the efforts of his own devoted troup of musicians, but on account of the fact that all those attached to his person formed the habit of going about the corridors preceded each by his own band, lest they should come upon the King unawares . . .

Perhaps the saddest instance resulting from these lapses was the case of the Little Princes of Hadramaut, who, playing about the palace grounds one day all unconscious of the royal peril, were seized by him and flung into the Tower of Babel, where they perished miserably of bedlam. The King's grief upon learning of this event from the

[1] Kernberlin, in his *Music of the Ancients,* ch. 2, p. 5, suggests in this the origin of the modern term "jazz," applied to certain decadent forms of music.

reproachful parents, was well-nigh unconsolable.

'I didn't want to do it! I didn't want to do it!' he cried bitterly, over and over again.

Of course the mortality among the musicians was simply enormous. . . ."

6

As may be imagined, affairs of state under such conditions would have been at a standstill in the kingdom had it not been for the presence of the Regent.

Shenanikin, Regent of Sheba, was an extraordinary man. The news of his parents' death, of his brother's accession and of his own consequent elevation to the Regency found him at his farm, clad in the simple garb of a husbandman, engaged in a series of experiments tending towards the evolution of a skinless prune. When informed by the envoys of the parlous emergency at Marib he silenced them with a dignified gesture and proceeded to the conclusion of his experiment, remarking as he did so:

"Verily, there are more ways than one of skinning a prune." [1]

[1] Transom, *Eminent Shebans*, ch. 1, p. 1.

Once established at Marib, after a number of hairbreadth escapes from his brother's aberrations, he adopted the policy of avoiding him entirely, maintaining an independent establishment in a distantly remote part of the palace. On the rare occasions when he found it necessary to communicate with him in person he took the precaution of setting his speeches to music, causing them to be played to the King by a full orchestra of his favorite instruments.[1]

In fact Shenanikin's whole conduct of affairs was inspired by an exemplary caution, sweetened by a very facile gift of oratory. Gorton, who devotes much space to him, says that—

"In the art of flattery he was unsurpassed, his subtle encomiums lying like the rich cheese of goats thick on the bread of his statements. Nor did he confine himself to subtleties, but spread his cajoleries with a two-handed trowel upon the consciousness of his hearers, in a manner which left them pleasantly giddy.

He was, of course, enormously popular. . . ."

This is Gorton at his best, but as is so often the case with him he has entirely misconstrued the

[1] Steinkopf has an interesting chapter in which he suggests the origin of grand opera in this custom.

character of his subject. If Shenanikin was soft-spoken, velvet-tongued and felt-slippered, as in fact he was, it was only the outward expression of the gentle soul, the timid, modest nature, the kind, charitable heart of the man.

Transom, in his *Eminent Shebans,*[1] is more generous and, indeed, infinitely more accurate.

"Something pathetic," he says, "something tremendously appealing in the short, roly-poly figure in the everlasting loosely flapping slippers, pattering about the palace corridors on a multiplicity of infinitesimal errands. Bucolic by instinct, fate called him to the choleric council rooms of Kings. A lover of nature, and of the tiny melodies of bees and birds, they surrounded him with blaring bands.

Industrious and painstaking, a tireless picker up and putter away of minute nothings, the intellect of a philosopher bent over the petty tasks of a scribe. An old man with a duster. Such was Shenanikin, Regent of Sheba."

7

Jehaz had been married six times.

His first wife, Stitch, a Princess of Punt, so dis-

[1] Ch. I, p. 2.

pleased him by her cantankerous disposition that he had her quietly murdered, to the great relief not only of himself but of his entire court who could not abide the lady. It is of her that the Mainim Envoy made his famous remark, reported in Björn—

"A Stitch in time saves nine." [1]

Hornblower does not mince any words concerning her.

"She combined," he says, "in her own mordacious person all of the less attractive qualities of a bowl of sour milk."

His second, third and fourth wives Jehaz accidentally slaughtered while under the influence of his malady; and to his intense subsequent annoyance and mortification, more especially as each incident of this nature made it increasingly difficult to provide a suitable partner for his somewhat hazardous throne. By his fifth wife, however, Zenobia, daughter of the Emperor of Kush, he had nine sons. Six of these he did away with at various times and for diverse, and often extremely sundry, reasons, two of them killed each other in boyish fun, and the last committed suicide out of pique, angered by the attention which his brothers were attracting. Nothing daunted, Jehaz reluctantly

[1] *The Origin of Catchwords*, p. 5.

strangled Zenobia, who had begun to weary him with her ceaseless lamentations.

Shortly afterwards, he married the Princess Anabasis of Troy, and this union was blessed with four sons, Eni, Meni, Maini and Mo, who were immediately removed from the proximity of the King, as the question of the succession was now exercising the minds of his ministers. Jehaz, fully aware of his own fatal proclivities, readily agreed to this arrangement, and decreed, moreover, that Anabasis should accompany the royal infants.

And then he took up Shimhi.

8

This Shimhi, destined to become seventh Queen Consort of Sheba, was a mere funambulist, a high-vaulter, a lofty-tumbler, an aerosaltant—in other words a rope-dancer.

A Scythian by birth and of very low origin, in fact of no origin whatsover, she captivated the susceptibilities of Jehaz during one of her performances at the palace theatre by the extraordinary beauty of her features, the grace of her person and the breathless daring of her poses, in the course of which she achieved contortions on the slack rope as classical as they were surprising.

The King would not be gainsaid. The little dancer, for her part, all oblivious of the future, was nothing loth. No sooner said than done. Shimhi awoke to find herself Queen of Sheba.

It was her last happy moment.

From the very first day her position at court was extremely insecure and called for the continuous exertion of all her powers of equilibrium. As it was she never obtained more than a toe-hold, which, while it may have been sufficient for a contortionist, was not adequate support for a Consort. Anabasis, of course, made herself peculiarly disagreeable in more ways than one, the outpourings of her jealous spite culminating in a shocking scene during the course of which she cast aspersions on the new Queen's character, not to mention various articles of furniture at her person, and wound up the recital of her scorn with that blistering insult which has often been called the Curse of Sheba.

"May your children all be acrobats!" she screamed,[1] and fell, most unfortunately for her, who could not pretend to be one, backwards down the palace stairs, at the foot of which she was found some few hours later breathing her last.

"And that's that!" was the King's only comment.

[1] Transom, *Eminent Shebans,* ch. 3, p. 17.

As for Shimhi, she merely shrugged her shoulders, with that increasingly rapid quivering motion, beginning at the waist and ending at the finger tips, for which she became so famous, and executed a faultless pirouette.

"Ishkebibble," she laughed, in her untutored vernacular. "Ain't we got fun? Like an actress a child of mine it should not be yet! What did it done you should hate it so—*Gottuniu!*" [1]

But even now, with Anabasis disposed of, Shimhi's situation was not greatly improved. The Sheban nobility, while they had been willing enough to crane their necks at her agility, were less inclined to bow them before her Majesty. Her path was strewn with innuendoes. Her slightest slip was made a landslide, her every breach an earthquake, and it was inevitable that she should commit many. Lampoons and sneering jests at her expense adorned the palace walls, the air which she must breathe each day was poisoned by caustic references to her former calling.

"Shimhi be nimble, Shimhi be quick,
Shimhi jump over the candlestick!"

[1] *Ibid.*

"A little contortion is a dangerous thing." [1]

These are examples, chosen at random, of the heavy-witted puns and scurrilous doggerel to which the Queen was constantly subjected. Jehaz, a trifle ashamed perhaps of his own impetuous infatuation for this nonentity, does not seem to have exerted himself in her defence beyond a few half-hearted wholesale executions and one general massacre of minor poets, known in Sheban history as Groundhog Day.[2] Shenanikin could undoubtedly have helped her, but there is no evidence in any of his correspondence that he was ever aware of her existence, or she of his.

Things went from bad to worse. Another palace insurrection was impending. Came that terrible night when the flower of the court gathered before the Queen's apartments for the purpose of sharpening their scimitars upon her doorstep.

"Death to the Scythian!" the corridors rang with their bloodthirsty cries. "Shimhi's crown is tumbling down, my fair lady!" [3]

It was on this occasion that one of the Queen's Shimhis, as her ladies-in-waiting were called, put

[1] Talmud, *Diaries of a Court Physician,* tablet 28.
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] *Ibid.*

her little finger in the latch and held the mob at bay.

Shimhi slipped out of the palace, disguised as a swan feeder, and was never heard from again. With her, as sole reminders of her lost greatness, she took twelve strings of pearls, nineteen ropes of diamonds, twenty-eight chains of chrysolite and a few other unconsidered trifles, amounting in all to some three million *shekels*. Behind her she left a six months old baby, and a brief letter to the King which has fortunately been preserved *in toto*.

"Dear Sir," she wrote. "You made me what I should be today, satisfaction I hope you got it. Goodbye and God bless you." [1]

Gorton, and Hornblower, and even Transom, all unite to condemn her in the bitterest terms, gibbeting her upon the pages of history as an unnatural mother and an absconding Queen. Under the circumstances this appears a little harsh. In her desperate plight it was a question with her of her jewels or her child, and she chose the jewels, which on sober consideration would seem to have been an excellent choice as being more readily portable and infinitely more durable. Whosoever will, let him cast away the first precious stone!

[1] *Annals of Sheba,* cylinder 2046.

Poor little misunderstood acrobat Queen! What was she? A street sparrow, a dancing doormouse, an innocent tumblebug in a gilded cage. A vacant chair. A song at twilight. Nothing more.

So let her stand before the judgment of posterity.

9

The baby, a girl, was taken to Salhin, to grow up beside her four little half-brothers.

Such were the lineage, parentage and birth of the child who was to be known in years to come as Balkis, Queen of Sheba.

CHAPTER II

BABY BALKIS

1

At a very early age the little Queen-to-be gave evidence of two pronounced peculiarities. She was ambidextrous, and double-jointed throughout. In addition it became apparent, as the light burden of her young years began to accumulate, that she was destined to be deliriously beautiful, in the fatal Scythian style every characteristic of which—alabaster skin, jade colored eyes, fiery red or "salamander" hair, tiny hands and feet—she possessed to a bewildering degree. Aside from that she was a romp, a hoyden, a madcap, a hotspur and a tomrig of the first water. So much so that when it came time to furnish a name for her, to supplement her royal cryptonym which might of course never be uttered above a whisper, the caconym of Balkis was chosen, meaning Tomboy.

If any evidence of her vagarious nature other than the testimony of eye-witnesses were needed Balkis herself furnishes it in striking fashion. Perhaps more than any ruler in history, certainly with infinitely greater prolixity than other contemporary sovereigns, she rushed into script on all occasions and on all topics in a passion for self-

revelation which proves a veritable cranberry bog for her biographers, embarrassing though it may have been for her relatives, friends and associates whom she does not spare in her autobiography.[1]

Of her extraordinary diaries there are four hundred and sixty-two volumes extant, half of which must be read with the aid of a mirror since, on account of her ambidextrousness, it was her practice to write two volumes at a time, one forward and the other backwards. And on the subject of her youthful escapades she is very explicit, and disarmingly shameless.

"Salhin Palace," she says once,[2] "was designed in what is called the Sheban manorial style, with roofs and turrets, and tin camels on top of them. Such a *beautiful* structure.

I was a child of the sand dunes and *quite* untamable.

I rode my camel-foal up the front stairs and tried to teach the Governor's high stepping Bactrians to jump, which they, poor knock-kneed creatures, were not in the least prepared to do now that I look back on it. I climbed our perilously

[1] *Balkis of Sheba, An Autobiography,* translated from the original MS. by the Pan-Arabian Society.

[2] Childhood, vol. 12.

inclined roof and slid down off it into the dunes sitting on a salver, by moonlight in my nightdress. Already in my earliest youth I had scrambled up every monkey tree, walked on my hands on top of every wall, and sat astride of every tin camel in my childhood home. I was, I suppose, *utterly* fearless. I thought absolutely nothing of running along the narrow ridges of the roof at breakneck speed, shod only in my gum sandals. This alarmed people so much, however, that I was reluctantly obliged to abandon this pastime."

In another chapter [1] she states that:

"I very soon showed a remarkable proficiency in dancing and contortionism, and could lift both my feet to the level of my finely penciled eyebrows and then clasp them behind my neck with disconcerting ease. This harmless amusement, or so I found it, seemed to shock a great number of people who went around saying, 'Look at Balkis with her Scythified airs.' A remark the full import of which I only appreciated later, but then I was never one to care *what* people said about me."

Again elsewhere [2] she observes:

"I was the life, and very often nearly the death,

[1] Childhood, vol. 13.
[2] *Ibid.*, vol. 14.

of the palace, and what my nurse described as 'a perfect hell of a child.' Our camel driver's wife called me a little microbe. Bumptious, excessively passionate, disagreeably plainspoken, impertinent as well as foolhardy, and always scornful of etiquette I was, no doubt, almost impossible to tolerate."

So Balkis fearlessly describes herself. It seems only fitting to add Talmud's famous characterisation.

"Balkis," he admits in his own diaries, "was not a plaster saint, nor even a plaster cast. She was a calamitous, clackety, combustive little imp of creation, full of furore, improvisation, high temperatures, and the common or garden bean."

2

In the meantime her education, as befitting a little Sheban Princess, was not being entirely neglected, in spite of the great handicap under which her governesses and tutors labored as a result of her well known habit of disappearing into the dunes for days and nights at a time, accompanied only by her faithful Tyrian trundletails.[1]

It was upon her return from one of these

[1] *Canis bellicosus.*

absences, which had been even more prolonged than usual, that she made her famous entrance into the audience hall of the palace where her guardians were assembled, discussing whether after all it were not their duty, irrespective of their personal feelings, to cause at least a nominal search to be made for her. The debate was at its hottest, many being of the opinion that it was a hopeless and entirely unnecessary task to look for a Princess in a sand dune, when the door suddenly flew open and Balkis came caracoling into the room, to the mingled relief and disappointment of the council.

"Here's me!" she announced in her shrill treble.[1]

It is almost exclusively owing to the efforts of her devoted nurse, Sophonisba, that any results whatever in the matter of proper upbringing and breeding were achieved with the wayward child who defied correction and spurned instruction. This Sophonisba seems to have been an extraordinary woman in many ways, that she should have been able to remain in close contact with her little charge for so long without losing either her mind or the child is proof of that; and, while in the company of her other governesses and teachers Balkis was forever giving way to tantrums and miffs—often

[1] *Annals of Sheba,* cylinder 5016.

putting their eyes out with her thumbs and otherwise annoying them—with her nurse she never resorted to any bodily violence.

3

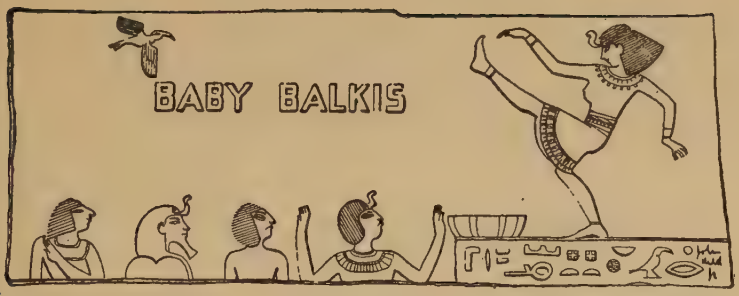
Notwithstanding the many interruptions in her schooling, Balkis was rigorously drilled in the fundamentals of learning essential to a Sheban young lady of her station.

Besides her own native Sheban, she spoke Phœnician, Mainim, Aramaic and Hebrew, and was able to make herself quite clearly understood in Aspirine, Listerine, Phenacetine and the various Arsenic, Sulphuric and Antiseptic dialects. There was hardly a living language in fact of which she did not possess at least a smattering.[1]

She was unusually proficient in cuneiform and hieroglyphics as also in the difficult Sheban consonantal script, written *boustrophedon,* alternately from right to left and left to right or as the ox plows. In the use of the *abacus* she was thoroughly

[1] Talmud has an amusing anecdote in this connection. When still quite a child she was taken to visit a Refuge for the Deaf and Dumb, and her attendants were at great pains to explain to her the condition of these unfortunates.

"I will make them hear fast enough," the little Princess exclaimed. "Let me at them!"



versed, although, as she often confessed afterwards, she had absolutely no head for figures and preferred counting on her fingers to any other method of computation. To her dying day she could never master the number of finger-breadths in a palm, nor the table of spans, cubits and reeds. Gaston Poteau attributes much of her later enthusiasm for travel to her utter misconception of distances.

In the higher branches of culture she received instruction in sarcophagus painting, mummy gilding, stone carving and papyrus chewing, as well as in the arts of perfumery, cosmetics, double-dying and depilation, palmistry, chiropody and poisoning. She was a finished performer on the lute, the three stringed *tanbur* and the *zamr,* not to mention the harp and the dulcimer, a matchless exponent of the dance, both sacred and profane, and of course an accomplished camelwoman.

Her reading, as might have been expected from her nature, was never confined to manuscripts especially dedicated to her sex but always inclined to more masculine subjects. She soon tired of *Sapphira and her Friends, Three little Shulamites, Little Mainim Maidens* and similar works, and turned eagerly to the boy stories of battle and adventure with which her half-brothers littered the nursery.

At fifteen she talked like a boy, she behaved like a boy, she often dressed like a boy, she could pass anywhere for one.

4

Balkis was just fifteen years of age when she discovered her exact relation to the crown of Sheba and the precise significance of the presence of her four older half-brothers. Hornblower vividly describes the scene.

"Until her fifteenth year," he says, "Balkis had been kept in ignorance of her close connection to the throne, very largely on account of her own supreme indifference to the history of her country. Her mother she could not remember; her father she saw very seldom, and then only as Caliph of Marib, the title which he adopted when visiting his estates; her half-brothers avoided her like the plague and never discussed family matters with their half-sister; there was nothing to arouse in her any suspicion of the true state of affairs.

On her fifteenth birthday, however, she accidentally came across a cuneiform table, inscribed on a brick which had strayed from her oldest half-brother's historical stack, showing a list of the Kings and Queen Consorts of Sheba and their

progeny. At the bottom of the list she found her name.

'Hot Stuff!' she exclaimed. 'Everybody works but Father.'

Her whole attitude towards national history changed at once. She summoned her tutors and soundly berated them for concealing these vital statistics from her, and asked a hundred and one questions concerning the ultimate possibilities of her discovery. At the end of the interview, in spite of serious damage to several members of her suite, she was forced to a realization of the fact that there had never been a Queen of Sheba in her own right. Her comment on this point was characteristic.

'We shall change all that!' she announced.

When, at great personal risk, one of her teachers ventured to point out to her that in any case she was the youngest of five children of the reigning sovereign, and consequently outranked by four half-brothers each one of whom in turn would take precedence over any claims she might advance, Balkis burst into tears and smashed the disappointing brick into a thousand fragments over the unfortunate man's head. She retired, finally, to brood over her cheerless future and as she left the apartment she was heard to observe——

'Eni, Meni, Maini, Mo,
Catch a brother by the toe,
If he cries don't let him go,
Eni, Meni, Maini, Mo!'

But as so often happens not enough importance was attached to this at the time."

5

Balkis retired to brood over her situation, but not for long. And if, as she says, she had none of her father's cold-blooded facility for getting rid of people, she nevertheless gave evidence of considerable dexterity in the face of emergency. In this case she brooded for three days, and then went forth unobtrusively and murdered her four half-brothers one by one in the order of seniority, a delicate touch which does her credit.

While Balkis herself is quite frank concerning the methods which she employed to achieve her half-brothers' and her own ends, respectively, it is to Gorton that one must turn for a full account of this quadruple homicide.

"One was company, she decided, five a crowd," he writes. "The four intervening, not to say interfering, Princes must perish. No sooner said than done.

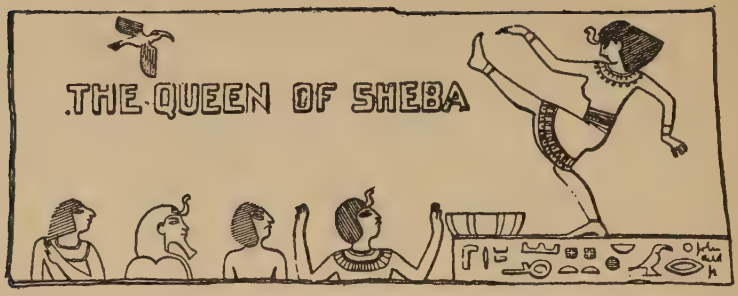
Eni, the first to go, she disposed of by insinuating herself into his chamber in the middle of the night, armed with a mallet and a supply of cedar tent pegs with which she proceeded to split his head in two. The unfortunate youth, accustomed though he was to her rough and tumble ways, could make nothing of it at first.

'Be careful,' he warned her. 'If you hit me like that again you'll break your arm.'

Seeing that she persisted in her attempts he rallied her on the number of times, judging by the sensations which he was experiencing, that she was missing her aim and hitting the peg not on its head but on his own, and twitted her on the proverbial inability of girls to drive a nail home with any degree of accuracy. To which she replied gaily that a miss was as good as a mile, and that if he would only keep his head still and stop wriggling she would have a better chance. The three younger brothers, who were sleeping in the same room, were convulsed with laughter at this sally and came and sat at the foot of Eni's bed to watch the fun.

'Hit him again, Balkis,' they kept urging her. 'He's just shamming.'

It was only when the increasing discomfort caused by the foreign substances embedded in his



skull began to irk him that Eni showed any signs of alarm.

'Have a heart!' he remonstrated with Balkis. 'What do you think I am, a human pincushion?'

But it was already too late. Life was fast ebbing away from him and, after a few hopeless attempts to pull out the offending pegs, he expired, presumably in great pain, to the huge delight of the others who set up a great tantarara over the event until Balkis roundly boxed their ears and drove them back to bed.

'Don't cheer, boys,' she commanded. 'The poor devil is dying.'

As for Eni, she piously closed his eyes, gave a parting thwack at a protruding peghead here and there and retired to her own apartment."

With the oldest brother now safely out of the way Balkis was free to turn her attentions to Meni.

"In the case of the second Prince," Gorton states, "she resorted to more subtle means of destruction. The uproarious behavior of the other boys on the occasion of Eni's demise had taught her that in future a lesser publicity would be better suited to her task, since, on the night in question, the pandemonium in the princely bedchamber had almost aroused the attendants sleeping nearby.

She therefore adopted the policy of tiptoeing into the room when all was quiet and pouring molten lead into Meni's ears as he lay peacefully slumbering. The first time she did so he awoke and complained drowsily that she was tickling him.

'What goes on?' he asked her.

'God's in his heaven, all's right with the world,' she replied.

The answer seemed to satisfy him, and during her subsequent visits she arranged matters so well that he was never disturbed.

She continued this treatment for six nights in succession and by the seventh morning Meni had become so topheavy that he could no longer lift up his head, and broke his neck while trying vainly to arise from his bed.

'Sleep, pretty creature, sleep,' Balkis remarked when she went in to look at him.

She was now, as someone has said, dormy two."

The remaining two boys, while they were not averse to a little harmless fun, nevertheless began to suspect at this point that their enterprising half-sister might have designs on their own persons. They took, consequently, to hiding from her in out of the way corners of the palace where she was at great pains to find them, and placed sentinels at

their doors and windows during the night whose duty it was instantly to decapitate anyone presuming to effect an entrance.

This resulted in the accidental slaughter of Prince Maini's valet and in the prolongation of the boys' existence for a space, at the expense of the peace of mind of everyone in the palace since Balkis became absolutely unbearable in her petulant impatience. But she persevered in her efforts and never despaired, and in the end her tenacity was rewarded.

"It had originally been her intention," Gorton continues, "to entice Maini into a game of Mummy, whereupon she proposed to gild him from head to foot with such fatal consequences as may be imagined, but the cautious lad persistently eluded her blandishments so that she had to abandon this plan.

His very caution, however, betrayed him at the last. For having retreated one afternoon into one of the more remote recesses of the palace grounds—a sort of sunken garden for exotic plants access to which was afforded by a single entrance cut in the high encircling wall—to his horror he looked up and saw his half-sister standing in the opening and smiling significantly from ear to ear.

'Alone at last!' she cried, and sprang in pursuit of him.

Over borders and flower beds, through shrubbery and in and out of fountains the merry chase continued, with Balkis forever intervening between himself and the only exit. It was only a question of hours. Finally in the farthest angle of the wall she cornered him, lame, exhausted and out of breath, and seized him by the leg.

'Peace at any price!' the miserable youth gasped.

'Eventually, why not now?' she retorted, and flung him headlong into a thicket of the deadly Giant Sensitive Plant [1] among whose enormous prehensile leaves he was forthwith crushed to a pulp.

'Ain't nature wonderful!' Balkis exclaimed, relapsing for the moment into the vernacular."

Of them all only little Mo survived, flitting about like the merry tomtit that he was. After all the trouble that she had experienced with Maini, Balkis made short work of her youngest half-brother.

"She conceived the brilliant idea," Gorton relates, "of secreting little dried up particles of sponge in his favorite cake which she then proceeded to feed to him on all occasions, interspersing these tidbits with liberal potations of camel's milk

[1] *Arbutus Pithecanthropus Erectus.*

to which the little fellow was also very partial. Every day she came to his door and enquired after his health.

'Is it well with the child?' she would ask.

The inevitable finally took place.

The sponges swelled to tremendous size, greatly distending the unhappy boy's gastronomic apparatus, until on a bright morning in June he exploded with a resounding detonation to the wonder and concern of all beholders.

'The young soak!' was her only comment." [1]

Balkis herself says of all this that:

"Perhaps I ought not to have done these things, but those who *really* love me will forgive me." [2]

She was now apparently heiress of Sheba.

6

She was not a day too early.

For fourteen and a half years, ever since the sudden disappearance of Shimhi, Jehaz had been steadily ailing. He held court as usual, for a while he visited his estates from time to time to inspect his children and refresh his memory as to their out-

[1] Steinkopf is of the opinion that the name sponge cake is traceable to this incident.

[2] Girlhood, vol. 59, left handed.

ward appearance, he even committed a murder or two in moments of distemper, but more out of force of habit than any keen enjoyment that he derived from them. The old zest was gone. For nine years now Jehaz had not stirred from Marib. His hair which had turned first gray, then white, had ceased turning at all. He was a broken, doddering, decipient old man, weary and ill at ease.

"The King has shot his bolt," they said of him.

The real fact of the matter was that the ill-fated Jehaz had gone peacefully and totally insane. Only, as in his present state he was infinitely more docile and tractable than he had ever been when merely partially out of his head, no one around him realized the shocking change that had come over him in recent years. However, on the evening of the day that little Mo detonated so tragically, a dreadful occurrence took place at the capital which opened men's eyes to a sense of the situation.

Jehaz set fire to Marib.

Hornblower, who has devoted twenty-four years of his life to a study of the next twenty-four hours in Sheban history, gives the best account of the catastrophe.

"Along with much other tittle-tattle," he writes, "concerning the lurid hours preceding the Queen's

accession, it has often been asserted that the great Marib fire was started by a camel who is supposed inadvertently to have kicked over a lighted candle in a pile of hay. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The Marib fire was started by the King, if not in person then at his instigation and with his full knowledge and consent, and in this attempt to fix the blame on an innocent beast of burden, if indeed the story is not of much later, and probably borrowed, origin, one can only see an effort on the part of some well meaning chronicler to exonerate his master.

The facts are these——"

Hornblower then proceeds to give in detail the contemporary sources from which he draws his information, extracts from the notebooks of the royal scribes who drew up the necessary orders, without any suspicion apparently of their true import, with itemized lists of the inflammable materials gathered together in various parts of the city for days in advance, and sundry comments made by prominent citizens as to the probable cause of the impending celebration, for so this proposed civic bonfire seems to have impressed them.

Hornblower continues:

"The conflagration spread with appalling rapidity, aided no doubt by the fact that the populace, wishing to show their appreciation of the spectacle offered them and enter into the spirit of the occasion, set fire themselves to a number of dwellings which might otherwise have escaped destruction.

So far so good. When the populace of the outlying slums, however, drunk with smoke and in a playful mood, began to show unmistakable intentions of advancing upon the residential section, and even upon the palace, considerable criticism was expressed of this form of popular entertainment. Who had ordered the fire—the King? Then let him stop it. Where was the King incidentally?

But that was the question. Where was the King?

A hasty search revealed nothing as to his whereabouts. The King was not in his counting house, the King was not to be found anywhere in the palace. The King had departed, leaving his Captains behind him. Shenanikin, when appealed to, had no solution to offer.

'What's all the shouting for?' he enquired.

'Marib's burning!' he was told.

'Throw on water,' he commanded, 'and save the women and children.'

'But the King?' they insisted.

'God save the King,' he replied, and went back to bed. . . .

They found him finally—on the roof of the palace, seated where he could command the best view of the burning city, playing the *rebab*.

'Ain't it a grand and glorious sight? Tatya-ta-ta!' he chuckled as they gathered anxiously around him.

To their protestations and entreaties he turned a deaf ear.

'Let her fry!' he ordered. 'Burn on, Marib, and cursed be he, and for that matter she, who first cries 'Hold, enough!'

The King was obviously quite mad. There was nothing for it. While he lived no one but he could countermand the incendiary royal order, and it was clear that he had not the slightest intention of doing any such thing. And meanwhile time, to say nothing of a large number of floating cinders, was passing. With heavy hearts they picked him up, chair, *rebab* and all, and dropped him gently over the edge of the parapet. So perished Jehaz, known subsequently in song and fable as the Martyr King.

'I only regret that I have not nine lives to lose for my country!' were his last recorded words.[1]

In the meantime the populace had been quelled by the courageous action of one of the court singers who, with great presence of mind, took up her stand on the palace steps and sang all nine verses of *Sheba the Gem of Arabia,* the national anthem. They returned quietly to their smouldering homes, and so one of the most turbulent and eventful evenings in the history of Marib came to a close."

7

It was now the duty of the Regent to summon the King's eldest son to replace his father. For the second time that night Shenanikin was called from his slumbers and apprised of the emergency. Reference having been made to the catalogue of the King's progeny, suitable messengers on swift camels, in the persons of the Royal Heralds—Camel King at Arms, Marib Pursuivant and Hickory Stick—were appointed to bring the good news from Marib to Salhin.

The story of the famous ride has been preserved

[1] Gorton holds to the disputed theory that what he really said was "Wrap me up in my Bedouin jacket."

in one of the best known epics in all Sheban poetry. Says the ballad in part:

"Listen my children and you shall hear
Of the midnight ride of the cameleer,
Ready to ride and spread the alarm
Through every Sheban village and farm
That the King had most grievously come to harm.
One sprang to the saddle, and two, then three,
One galloped, two galloped, they galloped all three;
'On your toes,' cried the watch, as the gate bolts undrew,
'Toes,' echoed the wall to them galloping through;
Behind shut the postern, the lights sank to rest,
And into the midnight they galloped abreast. . ."

They arrived at Salhin in the early morning and demanded to see Prince Eni.[1] As may be imagined this request threw the palace into a certain confusion. When the envoys persisted on being confronted not only with Prince Eni but also with the Princes Meni, Maini, and Mo, the confusion grew. No one dared confess that the four brothers had just recently come to violent deaths.

"Snap out of it!" the messengers kept insisting. "Trot out your Princes."

It was Balkis herself, finally, who relieved the delicate tension of the interview.

[1] *Annals of Sheba,* cylinder 6010.

"All, all are gone, the old familiar Princes," she informed them. "There aren't any more."

Now it was the turn of the Heralds to express surprise and indignation. Their leader, Camel King at Arms, was loud in his vituperations against the carelessness of the palace authorities.

"What, no Princes!" he stormed. "How come?"

Once again Balkis intervened.

"The world is so full of a number of Kings!" she remarked. "What's a Prince or two between friends? My hat's in the ring."

"But the State?" they objected.

"*I* am the State!" she retorted.

It is at this point that so many commentators go entirely off the track in their accounts of what transpired. Losing themselves entirely in the maze of legends surrounding the event they would have one believe that a boy was substituted for the missing Princes and that Balkis, Queen of Sheba, was in reality a man, and in fact never existed at all in her own person. This is sheer nonsense.

A boy was apparently substituted, it is true, but that boy was none other than Balkis herself, disguised to resemble Eni. This was all the more easily accomplished since no one at Marib, or in the entire kingdom outside of Salhin palace, had ever seen the

King's sons since their earliest infancy, and of course the Heralds were only too ready to wink at this small deception in order to bring their mission to a prompt and satisfactory conclusion. Hornblower entertainingly describes the final scene at Salhin.

"Balkis," he says, "dressed in a suit of Meni's clothes in which she looked every inch a Prince and wearing the greater part of his jewelry, could scarcely contain herself for joy. This was, in more ways than one, the crowning moment of her young life, and she was all in a fever of impatience to be gone upon her royal way.

'A camel,' she kept demanding. 'My kingdom for a camel—or do I have to walk a mile for one?'

They brought her at last her own white Bactrian, and without waiting for him to kneel she vaulted lightly into the jeweled saddle and put spurs to the beast.

'For Balkis—I mean Eni—and Merry Sheba!' she cried. 'Let's go!'

A grunting of camels, a parting cheer, and they were off, hell bent for coronation, as Gorton somewhat crudely puts it."

So the caravan sped, like a bird on the wing, over the dunes to Marib, bearing the lass who was born to be Queen. . . .

CHAPTER III

POMPS AND CIRCUMSTANCES

1

The Heralds, the little Prince—for so one must call the new sovereign of Sheba temporarily—and the long-legged white Bactrian all arrived together in a heap at the top of the grand staircase in the palace at Marib on the following noon.

"So this is Marib!" [1] the Prince was heard to remark as he staggered up the stairs.

This somewhat unconventional and entirely unexpected entrance was largely due to the early training of the Bactrian who, having been accustomed from his tenderest infancy to ascend staircases at Salhin, saw nothing incongruous about repeating the feat at Marib, all staircases being alike to him. Unfortunately, however, this staircase was not like any other which he had hitherto experienced, being extremely slippery and culminating in a great hall of mirrors in which he saw what appeared to him to be six hundred and fifty-two other white Bactrians converging upon his person. Whereupon he let fly with all four legs

[1] *Annals of Sheba,* cylinder 7004.

at once, greatly inconveniencing the Heralds, and slid unceremoniously up to the very feet of Shenanikin who was awaiting the royal arrival, surrounded by the court.

"Safe at home!" said the latter. "I am your uncle Shenanikin."

"Uncle me no uncles," the Prince retorted. "Home was never like this! You'll have to wash your steps. Hello, everybody!" [1]

The ice, let alone a large number of mirrors, was broken. The court smiled at this impudent princeling, sitting astride of the spread-eagled camel so disdainfully chewing his cud; the court grinned broadly from ear to ear; the court burst into hilarious laughter.

"Yo!" they shouted, slapping each other on the thigh. "A camel come to lodgment!"

The popularity of the Prince was assured from that moment, and, before many hours had passed, all Marib, waiting anxiously to learn the trend of the new monarch's possible idiosyncracies, was made aware of his frank, outspoken, unaffected temperament. Vast concourses of people gathered before the approaches of the palace, singing the Sheban national airs and clamoring for a glimpse

[1] *Ibid.*

of him, until finally he made his appearance at a balcony and responded to the frantic ovations which arose to greet him.

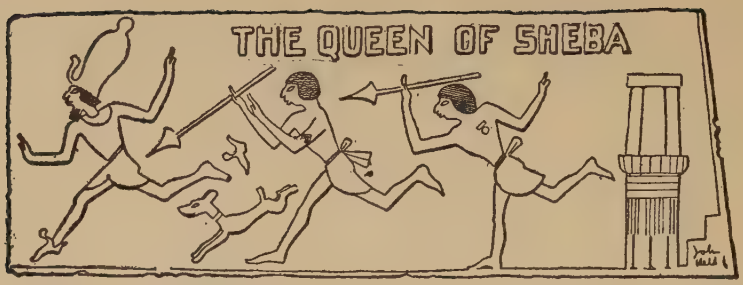
The initial public utterance of the supposed Prince has by a happy chance been preserved and deserves to be quoted *in extenso*.[1] Gorton is of the opinion that it was prepared by the Heralds, who were no doubt by this time in a state of considerable trepidation, and waxes facetious over what he is pleased to call the Prince's "maiden speech" in his customarily flippant manner; but one prefers to see in it the first outpourings of the girlish heart which must have been fluttering so joyfully under its borrowed trappings.

"Dear friends!" the Prince cried, amid tumultuous if somewhat startled applause. "Shebans all, countrymen, my Lords and ladies—lend me your cheers!

Last evening at the base of Marib's cupola, which all the while ran floods of water, great Jehaz fell. We have come to bury Jehaz, not to raise him. So much for Jehaz.

If you have fears, prepare to shed them now, for Eni is an honorable man, yes he is. I have neither fits nor starts, nor hasty actions, nor sufferance nor

[1] *Annals of Sheba,* cylinder 7118.



the powerful itch to spill men's blood. I only go right on trying to do my bit in a cheerful, earnest way and every night I ask myself the question, Have I tightened anybody's corner today or have I not?

I thank you one and all. My father thanks you, my mother thanks you, I'm sure. My brothers would thank you if they were present, but circumstances over which they lost all control will detain them indefinitely, I fear. However, I daresay they are with us in spirit on this great occasion. My sister will thank you in a few days, take it from me.

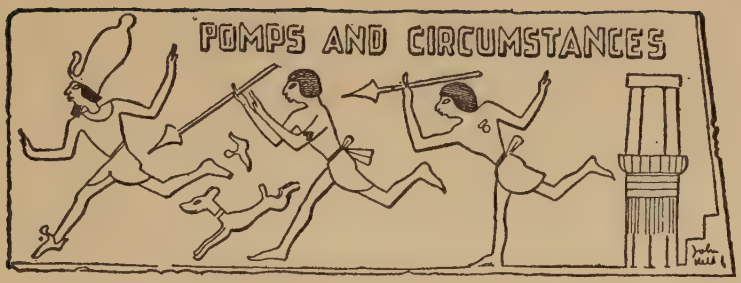
God save Sheba!

God save us all!"

One can hardly imagine the Heralds having composed such a document, Gorton to the contrary.

2

These Heralds seem to have been an efficient, cool-headed, cold-blooded lot. Their position was an enormously difficult one as at any moment somebody was liable to discover the fraud which was being perpetrated on the kingdom with their connivance.

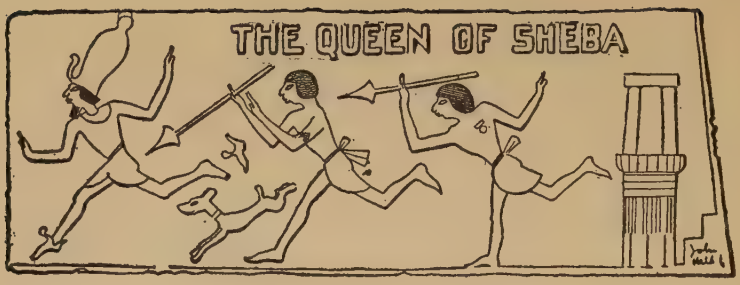


Nor was the situation improved by a view obtained of the Prince by several of the more gabby members of the court scratching the back of his neck with his left foot.

"Verily," they said of him slyly. "The young Prince contorts himself with easy grace. There's a reason. Ask Jehaz, he knows!"

Fortunately for the Heralds, however, the rigid etiquette of court functions required that none but themselves, or personages of their own choosing, should attend the Heir Apparent, and empowered them, moreover, to fix the time for the coronation. They solved the delicate problem by sending at once for Sophonisba, who had followed her young charge to Marib, with instructions to look around her right away and choose the nearest exit, and set the ceremony for the morrow.

However, the night passed calmly enough, as Arabian nights went, and all through the palace, when morning came, not a creature was stirring, not a drum was heard, not a funeral note, to mar the beginning of a perfect day. As for Balkis, she slumbered soundly and peacefully, presumably, with her chin cuddled on her feet as was her wont, while Sophonisba watched and sprayed her with sweet-smelling lotions.



3

At noon on the following day the Heralds presented themselves at the Prince's apartments to summon him to the Pantheon.

"Look who's here!" the "camel-eater" stationed at the door exclaimed, in accordance with the customary ritual for such occasions.

"The Heralds," he was told.

"What do you mean, Heralds?"

"King Eni's Heralds," they answered with great solemnity.

"Three men in the same boat!" Marib Poursuivant added, which, as may be imagined, was not included in the ritual.

"Tell that to the sergeant," the sentry warned them. "What's the good word?"

"Four and twenty blackbirds baked in a pie," the Heralds informed him, and the doors were thrown open.

Marib Poursuivant, as was his privilege, and in fact his duty, stepped into the antechamber and yawned copiously at the Prince, which while it may have been the former was certainly no part of the latter.

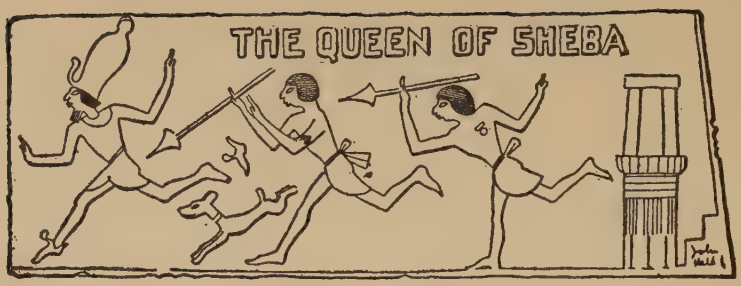
"Tell me naught in mournful slumbers," the Prince advised him.

"There comes a time in the affairs of men which taken by the forelock leads almost anywhere," he began to declaim the ancient formula, although slightly inaccurately.

"I'll say so!" the Prince replied, and the signal was given.

Down the grand staircase they passed, between bowing ranks of now properly subdued courtiers, to the sound of crashing drums and deafening cymbals. A company of Sheban guards in ivory tunics, fifty abreast, every man of whom stood nine feet high in his bare skin, opened the procession. They were known as the Immortals, from the fact that while they surrendered occasionally they never died.

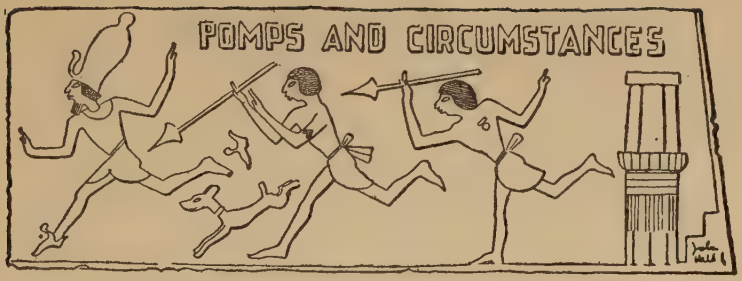
The Ministers followed hard on their heels, accompanied by their scribes and scapegoats, carrying each the symbol of his office—the Great Seal of Sheba, a somewhat cumbersome block of granite six feet square, the Pen of Statements, which was mightier than the Sword and twice as long, the Golden Horn, which none but the King might blow, the Coat of Many Collars, the Apothecaries' Ounce, the Widows' Mite, the Baker's Dozen and the King's Ransom.



After the tumult and the shouting had died, due to the fact that three of the Ministers had become entangled in each other's beards and fallen helter-skelter down the whole length of the stairs, thereby temporarily disrupting the line of march, there appeared in turn the King's Gossamer, the Royal Conifer, the King's Porringer and Tanager, the Architrave of Marib, the Royal Calamity Howler and the Keeper of the King's Quorum, all of them in their robes of state trimmed with pelf, and preceded by their myrmidons, psychopomps and mamelukes.

The next in line was Shenanikin, the Regent, surrounded by his janissaries of whom he seemed to be in considerable awe, never, as a matter of fact, having seen them all together in one place before,

"I don't know why it is, but they follow me around, all around, all around!" he kept muttering to himself, nodding his head from right to left and from left to right, a habit which he had contracted from much poring over his documents, until his attention become concentrated on the fact that at the last moment, in the hurry of preparation, he had forgotten to change his felt slippers for some more suitable form of footgear; whereupon his



terror of the janissaries increased to such proportions that he spent the rest of the afternoon trying vainly to run away from them, to the great discomfort of the latter who were not accustomed to such strenuous exercise.

"And so my day was utterly ruined!" the good man writes in his Journal.[1]

Behind him walked the Heralds, and every few hundred feet Camel King at Arms raised his right hand and addressed the multitude.

"Oh yes, oh yes, oh yes!" he cried, following the long established custom of such functions. "Believe me, it's the King."

To which Hickory Stick was forced to reply:

"Check! Take off your hat."

So with various delays, interruptions and accidents, inseparable from so great an undertaking entered into in such haste, the solemn procession went forth amid gales of delighted laughter from the spectators, and finally in the midst of a brilliant throng of two thousand turbaned nobles, seven hundred and fifty dancing girls and four hundred and seventy-five astronomers, magicians and ventriloquists whose duty it was to supplement by their

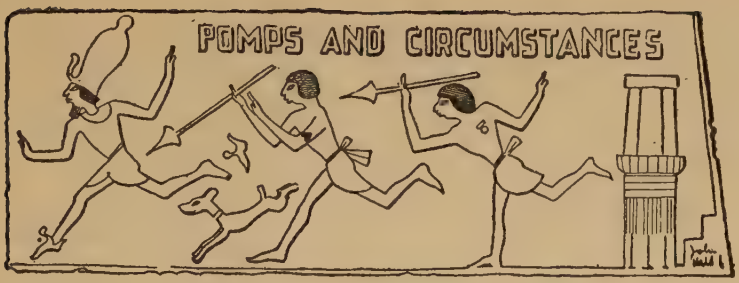
[1] *Mirrors of Marib,* ch. 18, p. 9.

art any deficiency in the volume of cheers which greeted the royal person, the Prince appeared.

". . . in a crystal litter," Hornblower says, "borne aloft by three hundred stalwart slaves gilded from tip to toe, who were thus condemned to almost certain death but fought among themselves for the privilege, nonetheless, so remunerative was the honor considered by their families. The poles of the litter were of solid ivory, and its floor and roof made of sheets of jasper inlaid with beryl.

The Prince reclined on a mountain of cushions stuffed with ostrich feathers and strung with pearl braids and tassels, clad from head to foot in a loose fitting garment of sapphires, a cloak consisting entirely of peacock's tails trimmed with emeralds thrown carelessly about his recumbent form. On his head he wore a diamond turban containing the Seven Great Stone Facets of Sheba; he was shod in slippers of silver and gloved in gauntlets of gold.

In this comparatively simple costume, for he had not yet assumed the full regalia of kingship which he wore on the return journey from the Pantheon, the supposed Eni passed to his coronation, leaning down occasionally to smile—and, as Gorton insists, to wink at the faithful Sophonisba walking alongside in splendid solitaires. . . ."



And so let her pass, Balkis the Tomboy, in her crystal litter, to her triumph where the Crown and Scepter of Sheba awaited her, and the Orb of State which she playfully sent rolling down the aisle at the close of the ceremony with the historic cry:

"Remove that marble!" [1]

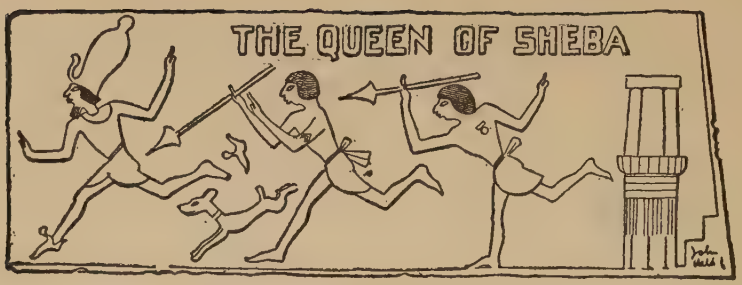
4

The real identity of the King might have remained undiscovered indefinitely, no doubt, had it not been for an unexpected mischance which befell at his very first meeting with his Ministers on the following morning. On what infinitesimal manavilins, indeed, do the greatest episodes in history depend; how many lives have hung on a thread, necks on a rope and reputations on a breath! In this case the King's incognito hung on a button.

The occasion is graphically described by Gorton, as set forth below with certain expurgations.

"It was only natural perhaps," he says, "the first time that she appeared alone in public, that is to say without the close supervision of her nurse or of the Heralds, that the disguised Queen should make

[1] *Annals of Sheba,* cylinder 7232.



a perfectly natural and essentially feminine mistake, carefully rehearsed though she undoubtedly had been in the various requirements of deportment and dress which she must observe.

The ceremonial of this first meeting with the Ministers demanded that the King should appear robed in the Coat of Many Collars, a very gorgeous double-breasted garment adorned with tier on tier of jeweled ruffs, gorgets and tuckers and fastened down one side by means of large emerald buttons. Matters were proceeding smoothly, and the conclave following its customary routine, when, oppressed by the heavy mantle, the King unfastened it, ... and allowed it to hang loosely over the arms of the throne. This was the original false step which led to ultimate discovery.

For at the conclusion of the ceremony, when it came time for the King to retire, he went to fasten the mantle up again and was unable to find the buttons, since he had instinctively folded it over the wrong way and was feeling for them on the left side, womanlike, whereas they were of course sewed on the right, as all men's buttons have been from time immemorial. But even this incident might have passed unnoticed by the male audience,

had not the King drawn attention to his predicament by exclaiming peevishly——

'Buttons, buttons—where are the buttons?'

It was then that the Keeper of the King's Ransom—a sour, crabbed old functionary who was decapitated a few hours later, incidentally—who had been eyeing the King suspiciously for some time, arose in his place and pointed an accusing finger at the monarch.

'Behold!' he volleyed and thundered. 'The King should button to the right of him but he buttons to the left of him. Someone has blundered!'

' 'Smatter Pop?' the King tried to pass it off with a nervous laugh, but without success.

'The fat's out of the bag!' the old man shouted, tearing his beard. 'I mean, the cat's in the fire—anyway I smell a rat!'

'*Where!*' the King screamed, and promptly fainted dead away.

During the subsequent efforts to revive him, ... and certain uncontrovertible facts became evident to everyone present.

'Let us return to our buttons!' Balkis remarked when she finally came to again."

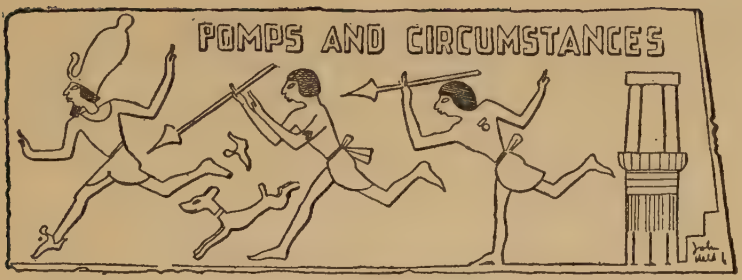
5

The discovery of the true state of affairs naturally made an enormous sensation throughout the palace and spread like wild-fire around the town, in whose public squares the news was proclaimed to incredulous crowds by the Royal Calamity Howler.

"Queen crowned King!" he announced. "Balkis betrayed, balks at buttons!"

Within an hour all the citizens of Marib were in the streets, shouting with laughter at the hoax and purchasing buttons with which to pelt one another.[1] Inside the palace a similar hilarity prevailed. In all directions the air was brazen with jests, mostly of an extremely scurrilous and utterly unquotable nature, at the expense of the Ministers who had been so completely deceived. The fact that the entire court had participated in the error was not allowed to detract from the gaiety of the occasion, so

[1] Steinkopf is of the opinion that in this incident may be seen the origin of the custom of throwing confetti in public thoroughfares at carnival time; and also suggests a kinship, supported by Björn, with the habit of hurling rice at weddings—the missiles used originally having been buttons and the act, it seems, symbolizing the wish that the groom might always know which side his bride was buttoned on.



much so that several of these unfortunate officials were on the point of sending for their scapegoats.

"You'll get my goat in a moment," one of them exclaimed. "Make a butt out of him!"

"Does he butt to the right of him, or does he butt to the left of him?" some wag in the crowd called out, and the uproar redoubled.[1]

As for the Heralds, safe from all attack now that the coronation was over and the new monarch installed, they merely sat back in their corners and twiddled their thumbs.

"Under such circumstances," they blandly informed everybody who cared to listen, "travesty is the best policy!" [2]

The only person about the court who seemed at all inclined to take the matter seriously was Shenanikin. It had finally occurred to someone late that evening that the Regent should be notified, since otherwise he was as liable as not to continue in ignorance of the *status quo* for an indefinite period, so engrossed was he in the affairs of state that he seldom found time to occupy himself with the state of affairs; and a deputation was

[1] Talmud, *Diaries of a Court Physician,* tablet 82.
[2] *Ibid.*

accordingly despatched to wait upon him in his apartments and apprise him of the situation.

The best account of the interview is furnished by Shenanikin himself in his Journal.[1]

"Arose betimes," he writes on that date, "and toiled all day at my scrivening, with but fair success so vast was the accumulation of complaints from those who claimed that they should have been invited to the coronation, and many of them justly too—I, poor wretch, having mislaid their names—but I did lay it up to the stupidity of my scribes, God forgive me!

And so early to bed, having no heart for my stint, when there came a great concourse of people, both men and women, at my door, clamoring of this and of that, and saying that the King was become a Queen, which at first I would not believe, answering them that they should depart and leave me to my slumbers and not disturb me with such taradiddles, since I deemed it improbable that so surprising a miracle should take place. But they insisted, beating with their fists upon the door and laughing among themselves, and shouting——

'Verily, a change has come over the surface of the King.'

[1] *Mirrors of Marib,* ch. 12, p. 24.

Whereat I grew exceedingly embarrassed and pulled the bed clothes up over my head and would listen no longer to their jesting, and after a while, I do not know how long, they retired to continue their merry-making elsewhere. Lay late, thereafter, pondering with a heavy heart over the future of Sheba, and talking to myself of many things—of carnages and Kings, and why the water they bring me is always boiling hot, and whether Queens have whims—and dreading tomorrow when all the King's horses and all the King's men will have to be marked all over again."

The whole timorous, bashful, prim soul of the man cries out in those touching lines . . .

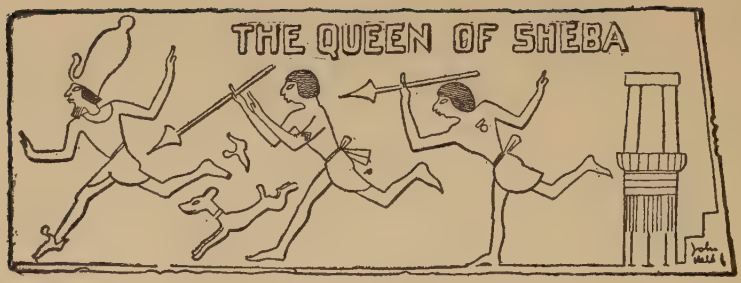
6

Balkis [1] herself has this to say of those stirring hours:

"I am very young, and perhaps in a few though not in many things, inexperienced, but I am sure that very few Queens have had more *real* good will and more *real* desire to be always merry and bright than I have."

Her first official act as Queen of Sheba, prompted, as Gorton insinuates, by Sophonisba but

[1] Coronation, vol. 52.



nonetheless creditable and far-seeing, was to send for Shenanikin. He came quite out of breath, all at sixes and sevens of the morning, as Hornblower puts it, surrounded once more by his janissaries in case his sovereign niece should be ill disposed, and kissed her left foot. She received him graciously, fed him some of his own skinless prunes in a lordly dish, and made him a pretty speech.

"It is my intention," she said, "to get rid of the other Ministers as soon as possible, for I want men around me who are not flat-heads, which most of them seem to be. But what would Sheba be, and no Shenanikin?"

Whereupon he kissed her right foot, helped himself to another prune and departed, murmuring delightedly as he did so:

"Verily, the favor lasts!" [1]

This proved to be one of the wisest acts of the Queen's career. With Shenanikin on her side, and indeed a great deal of the time at her side, as he was from that day forth, Balkis found her path paved with excellent intuitions and her throne a bed of roses from which every thorn had been removed.

Not that she remained aloof from the affairs of government. On the contrary, the new sovereign

[1] Transom, *Eminent Shebans,* ch. 16, p. 9.

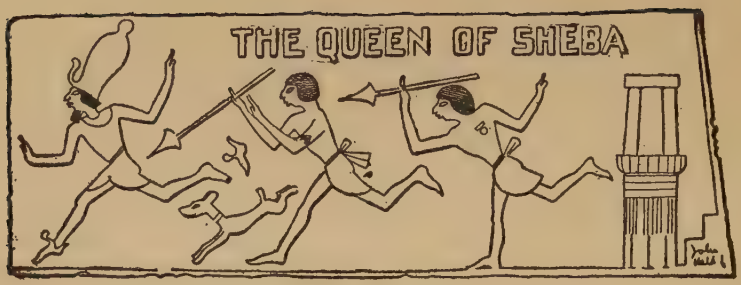
showed an unending zeal and a tireless interest in every last detail of her kingdom, and set about at once to investigate all its departments, asking an infinity of questions which the Ministers were quite often at a loss to answer, never having had reason before to study the subject so closely. Her habit of causing ignorant Ministers to be decapitated on the spot complicated matters still more, until one of them made the happy discovery that as long as her questions were answered the Queen was perfectly satisfied, quite irrespective of the accuracy of the statements made to her, her own ignorance on that score being as great as theirs.

The Queen, for her part, was overjoyed with the results of her research, and kept ponderous tablets always at hand upon which she recorded in sublime good faith some of the most extraordinary facts concerning her realm. On one occasion she reports this dialogue with her Minister of Shipping during the course of an interrogatory on nautical matters:

"Balkis: What do you mean by dead-reckoning?

My Minister: Counting the dead sailors after a battle." [1]

[1] Affairs of State, vol. 16.



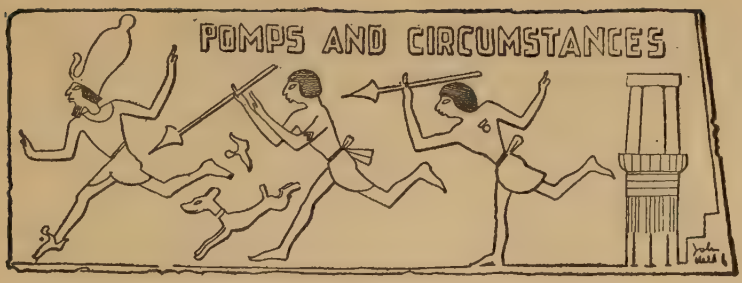
To all of which she invariably seems to have replied:

"Isn't that *interesting!* It's so wonderful to be a man and *know* all about things, but I'm going to learn all about them too, if I'm spared."

In the meantime she spared neither herself nor her associates, and, in addition to the inroads on their leisure caused by her insatiable curiosity concerning every variety of unrelated activity she also quite heavily taxed their ingenuity by insisting that all documents be referred to her for examination prior to ratification; a course which inconvenienced some of the Ministers not a little, since ordinarily they had no documents to be examined, let alone ratified, being content to draw their salaries without further encumbering the Royal archives. But rather than incur her displeasure, they sent her documents by the wagon-load, on brick, marble and granite, and on every subject from apiaries to zephyrs. Balkis herself says in her diary: [1]

"I can only repeat again what I have so often said before, that I have so *many weighty* communications from my Ministers, and from me to them—perhaps more of the latter even than the

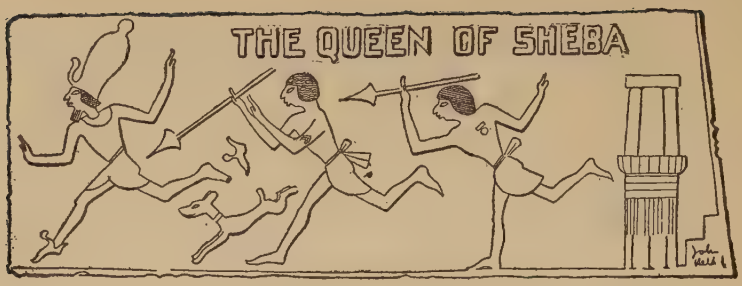
[1] Affairs of State, vol. 9, left handed.



former as they really seem to *depend* on my suggestions which of course I am only too *glad* to make if I can be of any *real* help—and I get so many bricks to thumb-mark every day, that I have always a *very great* deal to do. And the worst of it is, I *like* it!"

7

As may be imagined, the new spirit in the throne-room was not without its reflection in the whole physiognomy of the palace. Where in the past the court had walked sourly on tenterhooks, warily turning corners for fear of running into the insane old King, and allowing official business to be brick-yarded by scribes, now a feeling of personal security pervaded the windy corridors, an atmosphere of gaiety brightened the daily routine, a cheerful *bon-homie* animated a scene grown suddenly more decorous and infinitely more decorative. The horrid old monarch and all his horrid old men, with their recurrent butcheries, doles and mulligrubs, were vanished like a sigh in a gale of wind, and here in their place was Balkis, merry and blithe, and light as a feather, and fairly brimming over with sprightly ideas.



The entire personnel of the court underwent a change. The ladies in waiting were chosen for their beauty and charm, since, as Talmud relates in his diaries,[1] no matter how beautiful they might be they could not hope to outshine their mistress, except at great and certainly short-lived personal risk; the officials were selected for their comeliness and grace; among the Ministers not one survived who could not successfully conceal his age and create an impression of youthful fire and gallantry. White hairs were abolished.

"I will have no silver threads among the gold," Balkis decreed.[2] "Dye, if you must, your old gray heads!" she added, cleverly paraphrasing the national ballad.[3]

Ambassadors who doddered, or spilled their food, or suffered from gout, were sent home in richly gilded sarcophagi as a warning to subsequent encumbents. The palace was redecorated from cellar to roof in varying shades of green to match the Queen's eyes and serve as a background for her salamander hair; and at gala functions, of which there were at least two a day, green was the pre-

[1] *Diaries of a Court Physician,* tablet 93.
[2] *Annals of Sheba,* cylinder 7350.
[3] *Barbarous Riches.*

dominant note, emerald the prevailing jewel and red hair the favorite head-dress.

"The court," to quote Talmud again, "when attired to greet the Queen, resembled nothing so much as a field of poppies bowing in the wind——" [1]

The sole exception to these personal and sartorial reforms was Shenanikin. His one attempt at rejuvenation having ended in an unfortunate accident to his beard, as a result of which the latter displayed a dirty elephant's breath color for many weeks, the Queen graciously ordained that he be permitted to retain his own hair, and his was the only bald spot to be seen thereafter about the court. In other respects, however, even the Regent showed the effects of the changing fashions and manners.

Transom tells us that: [2]

". . . perhaps more than any other circumstance, the metamorphosis of Shenanikin furnishes an index of the sumptuary spirit of the time. His beard, his shining pate and his rotund figure he could not alter, indeed, but he did change his baggy garments, his dilapidated head-gear and his felt slippers.

[1] *Diaries of a Court Physician,* tablet 98.
[2] *Eminent Shebans,* ch. 17, p. 1.

The latter he discarded for bright red high-heeled shoes ornamented with large green bows. His head-gear he replaced with fancy turbans adorned with jeweled aigrettes. His pantaloons and jackets he had pieced together from the remnants of the material used for decorating the palace, which gave him a certain mottled but not unpleasing appearance. He looked like an ancient and very fat chameleon.

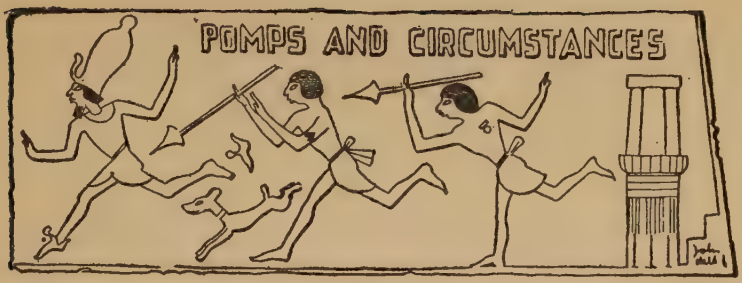
But the climax was reached when the enterprising old cocoon transformed himself into a social butterfly, gave entertainments which were the talk of the town, and took to keeping a racing camel stable!"

8

In addition to the Queen's rigorous enforcement of court etiquette, two of her innovations deserve special mention, namely her inordinate fondness for cats and her habit of holding midnight receptions in her sleeping chamber.

Concerning the cats, Talmud[1] states that her progress through the palace was heralded by a chorus of mewing which drowned out the sound of her own singers, and the noise of their purring when

[1] *Diaries of a Court Physician,* tablet 105.

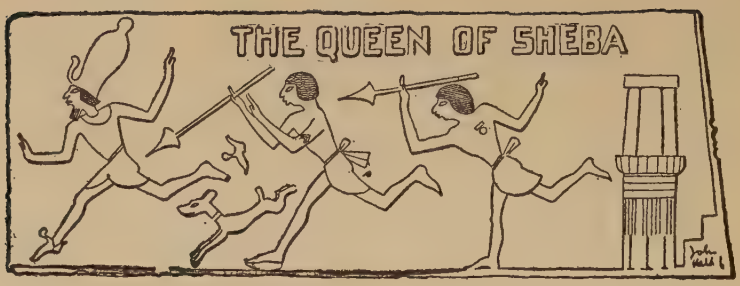


they arose to greet her was like unto the beating of a multitude of drums. There were some five hundred of them of all sorts and descriptions, two of whom, enormous black grimalkins with flaming green eyes, sat, stood and walked constantly at her side.

As for the midnight receptions, no functions so sumptuous are to be found in the annals of any other court. Steinkopf, who, in the preparation of his chapters on the origin of the wake as a social institution, devoted years of study to these elaborate entertainments, has left vivid descriptions of them from which one obtains a picture of surpassing grandeur and beauty.[1]

One hears again the gentle sighing of a hundred instruments, rising and falling like the slender spray of fountains, the restrained cadences of softly humming choirs, chanting the passing hours to their rest, the golden voices of the minstrels at their balladry, the honied flow of storied epics; one smells anew the heavy laden fragrance of the gleaming incense braziers, the scented repose of the moonlit night, distilled through countless casements from the silvery quiet of enchanted gardens; one sees once more, under the emerald glow of a

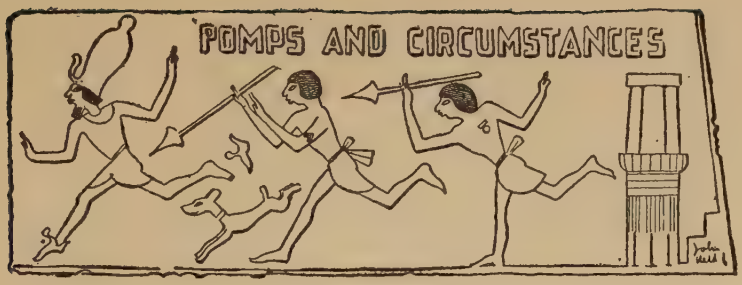
[1] *Gestern und Vorgestern,* chs. 5, 6, 7.



myriad lamps shaded in jade, subdued by the drifting mists of perfumed vapors, the courtiers in their glittering vestments relaxed upon the cushioned divans, the Queen's ladies disposed in groups of reclining loveliness, shimmering in their gem studded head-dresses—Gorton says shivering, but this is doubtless a typographical error—the dancing girls and jugglers intent upon their mummery, the gilded slaves purveying the manifold tokens of their ceaseless ministry . . .

And high above the brilliant assemblage—upon her massive bed of black ivory inlaid with rubies reached by a flight of one hundred and fifty steps, supported by a thousand brocaded pillows and attended by her fan bearers and hand lifters—the Queen, clad in her jeweled cloak of peacock feathers, discoursing of sundry matters with chosen companions summoned for the purpose to her nearer presence, or brooding silently over the propounding of some recondite question, surrounded by her great blinking cats . . .

Such is the picture one conjures up in the vast high-ceilinged chamber, around the monumental black and crimson bed—a picture of transcendent splendor bathed in smaragdine radiance, mysterious and cool—during those nights of the early years of



the reign; nights of a thousand varying delights that came to a close under a dimly auroral sky, when the first incipient yawn of weariness parting the Queen's lips sent the guests stealing forth regretfully to their own abodes, with the warning of the Royal Disperser ringing in their ears:

"The Queen has yawned—the Queen is not amused!"

CHAPTER IV

BALKIS IS WILLING

1

Seven hundred and thirty nights passed.

Balkis was seventeen, and at the crest of her rampageous youth, as she herself says.

Of her beauty so much has been written, so much has been sung, that it were presumptuous to attempt anew a description of her whose face it was that burst a thousand ear drums. Rather does one turn again to the famous picture of her left by Talmud.[1]

"The Queen," he says, "was a delicate tint made animate, she was an exquisite aroma come to life, she was a strain of celestial music in human form. Her slim body was an alabaster song, her graceful limbs an ambient fragrance, her countenance an enduring dawn. Not to have seen her was to have been born blind. To see her was to forget the sun, to lose all knowledge of the moon, to deny the existence of any stars. To have seen her and be denied the renewal of that sight was to strangle in darkness, to drown in shadows."

[1] *Diaries of a Court Physician,* tablets 126-127.

2

Her nature was characterized by an unappeasable restlessness, both of mind and body. Gaston Poteau says that:

"She was active as a flea and full of nerves, with a *je ne sais quoi* outlook on life which kept her constantly on the move. She was seldom known to have both feet on the ground at once, and her tongue was worn thin as a serpent's from endless usage."

From other sources one learns that she was "agile as a basketful of lizards and rumbustious as a village fair," and that "her gift of blateration was utterly untrammeled." Her mind was quite empty, and unprejudiced by instruction, and she found room in it for all manner of speculations. She never reasoned, but trusted to her own intuitive brashness. She talked, not at all wisely, and entirely too much; she suffered chronically, and those about her likewise, from a rush of words to the mouth, which flowed forth continuously like water out of a neglected spigot, unaccompanied by any previous ratiocination.

"She never reigned but she poured!" someone once said of her.

She herself states that: [1]

"Perhaps many people will say that I am inquisitive, but that is simply because they do not *understand* me. Quisitiveness and inquisitiveness —that's almost a pun isn't it—are two *very* different things, and I am always *desperately* anxious to learn, and *very* serious minded.

I think I can truthfully say that in *all* matters I am as passionate as a ripe pomegranate, in a perfectly *nice* way of course."

Such, in appearance and temperament, was Balkis at the threshold of her career, or as Gorton puts it——

"She was a beautifully vacant lot."

3

It became increasingly patent to the Ministers that she must marry. Aside from considerations of state which made this course eminently desirable, it also strongly recommended itself for economic reasons. Ever since the accession of the Queen a tremendous immigration had set in from the outlying districts to Marib so that at the end of a year the villages and dairies were well-nigh deserted, and agriculture at a standstill. It was practically im-

[1] Personal, volume 12.

possible to keep the young men down on the farms after they had seen Balkis. During the second year of her reign, indeed, not a single wedding took place throughout the entire kingdom owing to the fact that every eligible swain was preening himself before the royal presence in the hope of attracting his sovereign's favor.

And if any further incentive had been necessary, the Queen's own practice of flitting from balcony to balcony in almost any attire kissing her hand at whosoever might be passing below, thereby seriously interfering with the normal progress of traffic in the vicinity of the royal domicile, would have been sufficient to convince those in authority that some definite measures must be taken with regard to her future.

Balkis, when the idea was tactfully broached to her, was all for it.[1]

"Oh, what fun!" she exclaimed, clapping her little hands together, and promptly tied herself in a true lover's knot from which she was extricated only with considerable difficulty.

"Your Majesty must choose a Consort," they informed her.

"Oh, do I have to choose?" she objected. "I hate

[1] Gorton, *Secret Memoirs of the Court of Sheba,* ch. 22, p. 9.

choosing. It's like ordering things to eat, it's so much easier just to take what's put before you, don't you think?"

Whatever their thoughts might have been on that point, they explained to her that in this case, nevertheless, she must express a preference since it was a serious step which she was contemplating, involving not only her own happiness but also the welfare of Sheba.

"Oh, I know!" she agreed with them. "I often think that marriage is perhaps in many ways the most important thing in life. Of course it's different for a man—they have their own lives to live, and so many outside interests and all that sort of thing—but for a girl it's the one big vital fact of her existence and she can't be too careful, if you know what I mean—don't you think so?"

Yes, they seemed to think so, and it was accordingly decided that the necessary *pourparlers* should be inaugurated for the purpose of inviting suitable offers of marriage for her consideration.

"They have been talking to me about my marriage," she writes in her diary at this period,[1] "and I am so *thrilled.* To think that I shall soon be a mother, and it seems only *yesterday* that I was

[1] Personal, vol. 17, left handed.

playing with my dolls, but, of course, now I am too old for dolls. I often think what a wonderful thing it is the way time flies, and now that the day has come I realize more and more what a *tremendous* thing life is!

The trouble is that most people don't *think* enough about the *important* things, time, and space and all the other wonderful things all around one. There are books that tell you all about it, and they are really *most* interesting if one would only take time to really *study* them seriously.

Of course there will be no engagement for the present as I want to look them all over very *carefully* before I make up my mind, and I should not want to make any *final* promise for two or even three weeks at the *very earliest,* as the whole matter must be gone into *very* earnestly, and a Queen must always think of her people and remember that while one hand rocks the cradle the other rules the realm. I think that is *awfully* clever and so I put it down here although I didn't think of it myself. I'm not *quick* that way, but of course, it takes all kinds of people to make a world and we can't *all* be brilliant.

One doesn't buy a pig in a poke, and a husband is so very much more important than a pig, isn't

he? As I have said before I often feel that the reason why so many marriages are not happy is because people don't *think* about it enough beforehand. I read somewhere that all marriage was a gamble, and I think that is a *tremendous* saying."

Quite obviously, Balkis was willing.

4

The news of her matrimonial inclinations spread across Arabia and into neighboring countries with astonishing rapidity, and in a very short time every ruler, potentate, monarch and princeling who could afford the journey was on his way to Sheba to look at the Queen.

The King of Punt, the Emperor of Kush, the Princes of Ophir, the Lord of Tarshish, the Rajah of Pooh, the Sultan of Swat, the Caliph of Klout, the Dey of Deys, the Wizard of Oz, the Emir of Pish and the Satrap of Tush—hakims, maliks, khans, hylegs, sheiks and nuidirs—one by one, and then two by four, and finally cheek by jowl, they came pouring into Marib until the ranks of citizenry could scarce maintain their cheering.

It was estimated that at the height of the rush upwards of seven hundred aspirants waited in line every morning outside the palace gates. And this

did not include the great quantity of embassies despatched by sovereigns who were unable to present themselves in person and so compromised, as Gorton says, by sending in persons with presents.[1]

Of the many who called, so Talmud relates in his diaries,[2] comparatively few were chosen. A rigid inspection was in force at the outer portals and only those who were sufficiently gifted might hope to gain further admittance, a special apartment being set aside for the purpose over the door of which was written:

"Give up all gifts here, all ye who enter."

For the consolation of such as were turned away Balkis graciously consented to exhibit herself once a day at the great balcony, a practice which she was obliged to continue by popular request, in spite of the large number of suicides which followed daily after this manifestation of her forbidden charms.

"The face that kills," as someone termed it.

As for the other more fortunate ones, the same

[1] Even the aged Shush saw fit to count himself among the latter, and the Queen's reply to his presumptuousness has become historic. "Keep your little grey dome in the West," she sent him back word.

[2] *Diaries of a Court Physician,* tablet 206.

routine was observed for all. Each was ushered into the audience chamber and given five minutes in which to state his claims to consideration while Balkis observed him closely through a jeweled screen. At the end of that time the latter was raised and the suppliant was permitted to view the Queen for a brief instant. Many of them are reported to have dropped dead on the spot at the sight of so much loveliness.

The ones who survived were apprised of their fate in the following manner. In the case of those she disliked Balkis simply pressed a button, whereupon they disappeared forthwith through a trapdoor in the floor. Those on the other hand whom she wished to honor further with her company received a marble slab, presentation of which at the entrance entitled them to participation in her midnight receptions, on which were inscribed the words, "Balkis, long may she reign!" from which they became known as Reign Checks.

5

No complete catalogue of her innumerable suitors is necessary, or even available, but among them two individuals stand out and deserve a special mention.

The first, Pilaster of Pharos, a charming youth in his very early twenties, seems to have made an immediately favorable impression on the Queen by spending his entire original five minutes going about the audience chamber petting her cats.[1]

"Your time is up!" Balkis warned him when the screen was lifted.[2]

"High time, as you might say," he murmured. "How about my number?"

"You're pretty fresh," she observed.

"Fresh every hour," he agreed. "But oh me, oh meow!"

"What?"

"I wish I were a cat."

"Why?"

"Because the cat came back!"

Needless to say he did not disappear through the floor, the Queen having, as Gorton puts it, kept her trap shut, but received his slab and went on his way rejoicing.

"Marbelous, marbelous!" he exclaimed as he retired, and Balkis tittered.

[1] Aside from that he appears to have been a humorist. He had brought along a large quantity of grass which he distributed to the delighted animals, remarking as he did so that he realized it was catnip and tuck with him, and that the least he could do was to say it with flavors.

[2] *Annals of Sheba,* cylinder 7562.

Her diaries are full of glowing references to him. [1]

"Pilaster is a very *dear* and fetching young man," she writes at one time, "and he has *such* a *sweet* way of expressing himself. His mouth is always wide open, and he has something *quite beautiful* to say whenever he gets a chance to speak, and he is *so good* to me, you really have no *idea!* He is very handsome, and *such* a good spender, and, I expect, *frightfully* expensive to his parents."

Once more elsewhere she says ". . . he is so *very, very* fresh, and gets so *gay* with me and everything, and always has some bold, delightfully *wicked* thing to say, even at breakfast. He really is so pleasant to have about the house, as I always think that a man who is obliging at breakfast is a *rare bird.* I know that I'm not good for *anything* myself until I've had my morning chocolate, but I think that Pilaster talks more then than at any other time. Of course I'm thinking of things to say as soon as I've finished my cup so that it's not as though I were not doing my *share.*"

From another entry it appears that ". . . I do *so* love him, and from the few things that he has said I feel *sure* that he means business, although he

[1] Suitors, vol. 165.

doesn't wear his heart on his sleeve, he's not *that kind.* But a woman can always tell somehow when a man is *really* interested, and I know that he has been trying to *say something* for some time. I almost dread it because I feel that it will put an end to our *perfect* friendship, but of course what must be must be."

And then he went away.

Pilaster disappeared one morning and never came back. Talmud relates that he sold all his camels and went to Aphasia. A year later Balkis herself says:[1]

"That low-down pup Pilaster, who used to hang around here so much, has come home. They tell me his hair has turned completely blue. I have heard of that happening before, of course, but never so *rapidly.* It serves him right, the big stiff!" [2]

6

The second suitor, Colossus of Rhodes, was an entirely different sort of person. He was nine feet high and extremely hairy, with enormous limbs and

[1] Suitors, vol. 316, left handed.

[2] Gorton has a cock and bull story to the effect that it was not Pilaster's hair that turned blue but his face, and that it happened before he went away as a result of the Queen's incurable talkativeness, but this is probably just a myth.

a voice like a bull, and seems unquestionably to have been the ugliest creature that ever lived.[1]

He created a sensation on the occasion of his first appearance before Balkis by dragging ten of her unfortunate guests after him into the audience chamber with whom he proceeded to perform various feats of juggling, whereupon he tore the jeweled screen from its hinges and bunched his muscles at the Queen.[2]

"That's the kind of fellow I am," he told her. "I'm a tough guy, see? Move over."

Balkis presumably did so, at all events no more applicants were admitted that day.

"You're frightening poor little me, you big, rough man!" she complained.

"Lay off that stuff, kid, lay off it," he retorted. "Rub me the wrong way and I'm mean, see, but treat me right and I'm as meek as a lamb. I'm a rough diamond, I am!"

"And you've come all that great long way just to see me?" she asked him. "I'm afraid you'll be terribly disappointed!"

"Don't make me laugh! You're the berries, kid, and I'm for you, see?" he informed her, and fetched

[1] Talmud says that he was the least dressed man in the world.
[2] *Annals of Sheba,* cylinder 7426.

her a resounding smack on the shoulder which nearly knocked her flat.

"My, but you're strong!" Balkis sputtered.

"Queen," he exclaimed. "You said a mouthful!"

Colossus at once became an assiduous caller at the palace and would not suffer any of his competitors to show their faces inside the doors. Balkis herself was fascinated by him, and if she had underlined her diary where Pilaster was concerned, in the case of Colossus she filled it with capitals.

"He is a great, *gorgeous* ANIMAL," she writes of him.[1] "There is something so *primitive* about him and so *wholesome,* and he always makes me long for the *great outdoors.* He is a MAN'S MAN, and so *very strong,* but he is gentle with dumb beasts and with little children, the way all *really* strong men are. Of course he is simply TERRIBLE when aroused.

The more I see of him the more I know we were simply MADE for each other, and the more I *love* him. He is my soul's TRUE MATE. There seems to be something WILD in my nature that responds to his. It is so *exciting* being with him, and he is so fond of pulling me around by the hair and twisting my arms and legs around. I don't

[1] Suitors, vol. 279, right and left handed.

think he has ever seen a doublejointed person before, and it seems to *amuse* him so! Sometimes I feel that I am nothing more than a toy, or a doll, to him, but when I ask him about it he just laughs and says Some doll, kid, some doll.

Sometimes he puts his great hand on my mouth and won't let me say a word, but just sits and STARES at me, until I can't *stand* it any longer, but simply *have* to say *something*. But I love those wonderful silences, as I always think that between people who *really* understand each other words are not necessary; and Colossus thinks so too, because I asked him and he said, Now you're talking again!"

From all accounts Balkis suffered many inconveniences at the hands of Colossus besides the hair pulling and general acrobatics of his more playful moods.

On one occasion he had hardly gone from her reception when he came climbing through the window again, treading on her cats and generally comporting himself like a gale of wind in a thimble, for the purpose of taking her driving with him.[1]

"Hey there, Balkis!" he called to her. "How about a little joy-ride?"

[1] *Annals of Sheba,* cylinder 7639.

"But Colossus—it's so late," she objected. "Why, the idea! Go home this instant, you naughty boy!"

"Cut that stuff! Shank of the evening," he assured her. "Come out before I pull you out!"

"But what will people say?"

"Leave that to me, see—you know me, Bal old kid!"

And so, rather than make a scene, Sophonisba bundled her up in emeralds, and Colossus bundled her down in a jiffy and took her driving through the night behind his spanking team of black dromedaries, but, as may be imagined, the escapade made a great stir in the more prudish circles of the court, and while the only thing that Balkis complained of when she returned was cold feet, there were many who seemed to have cold shoulders over the affair.

But in spite of these minor incidents matters were progressing very favorably and the election of Colossus was practically conceded.

And then he went away.

Colossus disappeared one morning and never came back. Talmud relates that he bought all the camels that Pilaster had sold and went to Atlantis City. Gorton adds that he left a brick on Balkis

before departing inscribed: "The only possible rest is silence—goodbye, girl, I'm through."

7

Balkis was heartbroken.

Pilaster was gone, Colossus was gone. The palace was full of vacant chairs.

"I can't *imagine* what's biting him," she writes.[1] "Only the *day* before he left he said, You've got me going, kid—and now *everything* is SPOILED and my life is a GLOOM!"

Her Ministers, while they were not heartbroken, were nonetheless extremely perturbed, for in addition to the above named suitors most of the others also were going as fast as they could. They arrived, they looked at the Queen, they visited with her for a while—and then they never came back!

Quite obviously, Balkis was willing but the suitors were not.

What could be the reason?

[1] Suitors, vol. 806.

CHAPTER V

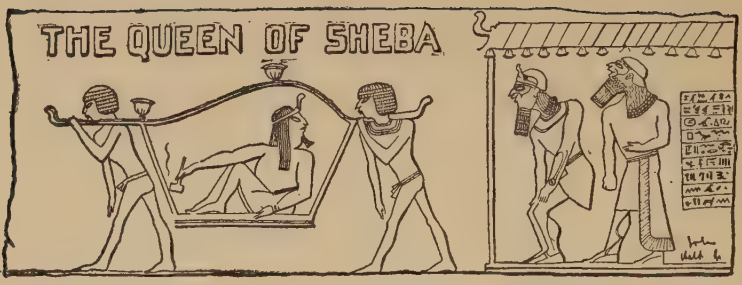
SOLOMON, HIRAM AND SHUSH

1

One is compelled to turn aside at this point for a space from the more intimate concerns of the court of Sheba, leaving the Queen and her Ministers to grapple with the departing suitors, as Gorton expresses it, and devote a few words to more serious international matters, maturing beyond her borders under the leadership of the three most fascinating personalities in all history.

Seldom in the course of human events has a truly great man arisen to control world affairs who was not condemned by his own genius to that utter loneliness which comes of enforced association with inferior minds. Seldom has the concatenation of earthly circumstances conspired to bring together a group of peers, any one of whom alone was qualified to illuminate the furthermost limits of his era. Seldom has such a group consisted of so scintillating a triumvirate of luminaries as the three contemporaries who adorn the brilliant chronicle of the age which they inspired.

It is to summon up all the material pomps, all the intellectual splendors, all the artistic glories, all the fresh exuberance and spiritual magnificence of



the unforgettable Purple Age simply to recite their names. Shush V of Ma'in—who has already figured in these pages, and who was perhaps the least important of the three, for all his sinister far-reaching influence—Solomon I of Israel and Hiram VIII of Tyre. Three great Kings whose deeds are treasured in the archives of posterity, but above all three intensely human perpetrators of glorious follies, three great men whose weaknesses were but the recreation of gigantic natures, three merry monarchs who rolled their own, as someone has said.[1]

2

Solomon at the age of thirty-two was famous for his wit, his wardrobe and his wives.

Heimweh, who, in spite of his jaundiced outlook and often odious comparisons, is nevertheless the one outstanding authority on the great characters of the period, says that:

"Solomon was the Beau Brummell of his day. He was an entirely tailor-made man, but while it only took nine tailors to make an ordinary mortal, it took nine hundred of them to make Solomon.

He possessed three thousand suitings, of all styles and materials, and his assembled wardrobe

[1] Commonly attributed to Dr. Traprock.

filled twenty-five rooms in what was known as the Rainbow Division of the palace, and required the constant attention of two hundred and fifty valets. Aside from these personal attendants he had attached to his household a corps of highly trained scent detectors, whose duty it was to trace and utterly destroy all lilies of the field, a flower which the King for some reason could not abide, claiming that they ruined his clothes."

Concerning his other foibles and extravagances, whole chronicles have been written.[1]

He had an absolute mania for horses. Heimweh, in one of his rare accesses of humor, says that:

"As a bridegroom he was a great success, but as a bridlegroom he had no equal." [2]

He was utterly reckless in the matter of cutting down trees and at one time he had as many as eighty thousand wood cutters at work in Lebanon alone.[3]

[1] See Hebron Papyrus.

[2] In the palace stables he maintained forty thousand stalls of caples, prancers, chargers, bidets, steeds, curtals, rouncies and coursers for his fourteen hundred chariots, and when he rode forth in state he was accompanied by a body-guard of twelve thousand cavalrymen. This passion of his for mounts and equipages was much criticised throughout the land, the humble ass and the modest hinny having hitherto been considered adequate enough means of transportation, even for Kings.

[3] Sackcloth and other scientists do not hesitate to blame his

He developed a perfect craze for building. Heimweh states that:

"When he was not erecting palaces for his wives with the timber which he cut, he was building cities of refuge from their families. All Israel during his reign was a vast construction yard, and from a distance, owing to the innumerable scaffoldings which arose above it, the city of Jerusalem resembled a bunch of toothpicks."

Even Heimweh, however, does not seem to have grasped the significance of these propensities. The fact is that Solomon yearned to be considered a patron of the arts. Whether from a desire to escape from the importunities of his wives, or from a genuine love of the beautiful, he determined to surround himself with all of the most cunning artisans, workers in gold and in silver, in brass, in iron, in stone and in timber.

Whatever his motives, he filled his court with brilliant artists and his courtyards with gorgeous stuffs, which his fleets went far and wide to seek. With all due respect to Sackcloth and Heimweh, he made possible such a gathering of peerless crafts-

widespread deforestation for the changes in climate which gradually came over Palestine.

"Solomon," one of them remarks, "might well have said, After me the drought!"

Opposite is a reproduction of a very rare sample of a painted panel. The original having come to light in the Middle Ages, after centuries of oblivion, the monk who discovered it, sketched by the extreme rapidity which characterized the true artist's work, provided, with pen and ink, so superimpose clothing on the various figures. This accounts for the style of costume displayed, the monk having naturally followed the sartorial standards of his day.

The first panel shows the Queen of Sheba setting out from Nineveh on her journey to Jerusalem, surrounded by her nobles and musicians. The background gives a typical view of a Sheban country side. The Queen is preceded by some of her camels, which will be noted, belong to the Lumbus "Shetland" variety, now seldom

(See also Page 17)

Opposite is a reproduction of a very rare sample of a palimpsest painting. The original having come to light in the Middle Ages, after centuries of oblivion, the monk who discovered it, shocked by the extreme nudity which characterized the first artist's work, proceeded, with rare patience and skill, to superimpose clothing on the various figures. This accounts for the style of costume displayed, the monk having naturally followed the sartorial standards of his day.

The first panel shows the Queen of Sheba setting out from Marib on her journey to Jerusalem, surrounded by her nobles and musicians. The background gives a typical view of a Sheban countryside. The Queen is preceded by some of her camels, which, it will be noted, belong to the famous "Shetland" variety, now extinct.

(*See also page 124*)

Courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art

THE QUEEN OF SHEBA SETTING OUT ON HER JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM

men as the world has not seen before or since, and flooded his age with the radiance of a magnificence which has never been surpassed. Trees will grow again on Lebanon, buildings rise and wane, but the glory that was Solomon will never return.

3

Along with his other manifold possessions Solomon seems to have accumulated seven hundred wives, every one of whom was a Queen. Heimweh, with his usual acerbity, is quick to point out that he must consequently, at a conservative estimate allowing for only six in a family, have had some four thousand two hundred relatives-in-law.[1]

"And yet," the crabbed old scholar exclaims, "he was famous for his wisdom." [2]

Certain it is that these relatives made a great nuisance of themselves, inflicting their presence on their rich son-in-law in and out of season and severely draining his patience, to say nothing of his treasury.[3] Once a month he rounded them all up

[1] Gorton says 9247.

[2] Gaston Poteau, with his lighter Gallic touch, simply observes *"quel courage!"*

[3] Some of his fathers-in-law, indeed, turned out to be quite disreputable and became a great source of mortification to the fastidious young monarch—such as that old rake of a Pharaoh, for instance, sprung from a no account little Lybian family, one of the

and packed them home, but a new batch arrived almost immediately by the next caravan, having, like certain armies, so Heimweh remarks:

". . . traveled a long way on an empty stomach."

Concerning the ladies themselves, beyond the fact that they were ravenously beautiful as one chronicler puts it, hardly anything is known. Very few of their names even have survived, Solomon himself having experienced considerable difficulty in remembering them in his own day. Psha of Persia, Panorama of Punt, Ichneumon of Egypt, Tchalk of Magnesia, Pilaff of Tripoli, Ps'alt of Ammonia, here and there a title remains, as for the rest their names are legendary. The less serious members of the court referred to them always as the Foreign Legion.

That they greatly annoyed Solomon by their endless bickering is common knowledge, however; and the circumstance, moreover, that no three of them spoke the same language gave rise to his famous epigram to the effect that while marriage was a lottery, polygamy was a polyglottery. It is no secret, also, that they finally succeeded in com-

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down-at-heel remnants of the decadent twenty-first dynasty—*"un petit bourgeois"* as Gaston Poteau calls him—who sprinkled snuff on his food and habitually filled his pockets with spoons.

pletely ruining his digestion by forcing upon him all manner of outlandish dishes which he was obliged to consume for fear of wounding their national pride, until in the end he revised his epigram to bemoan the fact that polygamy was not only a polyglottery but also a polygluttony.

"Too many cooks spoil the betrothed," he once sadly confessed.[1]

4

Aside from that Solomon was undoubtedly the greatest fop, jack-a-dandy and prick-me dainty of his time.

Born at the hour of midnight, at the junction of a Monday and a Tuesday, the child was both fair of face and full of grace, and already in his early manhood he had formed the habit of spending hours of the day in the cheerful contemplation of his own features, and in the painstaking adornment of his person. Heimweh states that:

"When Solomon was arrayed in all his glory he looked like a Chinese wedding and smelled like an explosion in a perfumery shop. When he sat on his throne he scintillated like a prism, and when he

[1] Hebron Papyrus, ch. 26, v. 3.

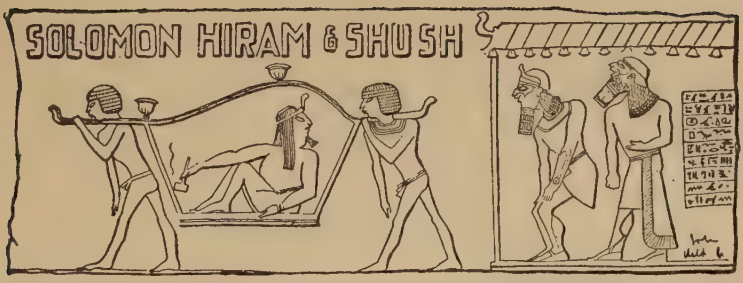
moved he tinkled all over like a crystal chandelier in a draught.

Every hair of his head, and also of his beard, besides being numbered, was separately curled, and a detachment of fifty-seven barbers were employed for this purpose. His finger nails were gilded, and polished with meticulous attention every morning; each of his eyebrows was parted in the middle, and his lashes were plaited in minute braids. His body was painted from head to foot prior to any function to match the raiment selected for the occasion, and he wore large rings set with mirrors in which to view himself from time to time and detect any imperfections in his appearance."

Of his luxurious mode of life fabulous accounts have been handed down. Contemporary sources indicate that in the Jerusalem of his time silver was used for paving the streets, and that the motes in the sunbeams consisted entirely of gold dust. All of his household and table utensils were of gold, pins being the only article in use made of silver.[1]

Twelve officials were responsible for the furnishing of the royal provender, each of them serving

[1] A fact which suggests to Steinkopf the origin of the phrase pin money, together with an interesting discussion of the world wide superstition regarding the picking up of the above mentioned objects.



for a month, the others merely standing around and being waited on. Seventy thousand burden carriers were at his beck and call under the supervision of four thousand butlers. When he touched his bell six hundred boys leaped forward to learn his pleasure, and a contemporary once remarked that the sight of their hands outstretched in farewell to some departing guest was as a grove of itching palms.

These figures, chosen at random, give one a vivid, though to be sure only very meager, conception of the magnitude of Solomon's domestic establishment, and do not of course include the retinues of his Consorts.

5

Such, briefly, was Solomon, with his clothes and his fads, his wives, his horses and his buildings. Except for the sumptuous flowering of the arts which matured under the patronage of his vanity, one is tempted perhaps to ask wherein lay his claim to everlasting fame.

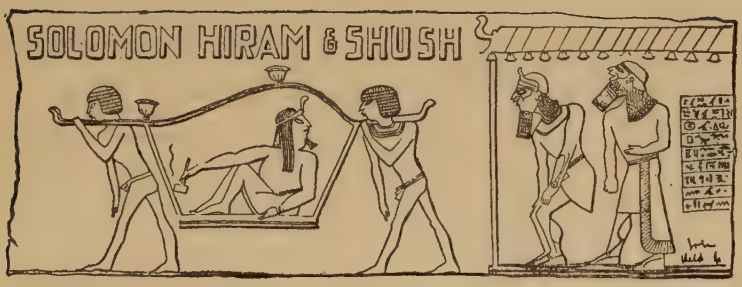
And at once one is confronted with one of the fundamental characteristics of the Purple Age. Its great exponents were outwardly either rakes or popinjays, they flaunted personal eccentricities in the face of an amazed world, they conducted them-

selves in public after the manner of buffoons. Shush, on the surface, was merely a flatulent mountebank, Solomon a painted skipjack, Hiram a blustering gadabout.

Actually each of them possessed qualities which place them on the high pedestals of history, each of them contributed conspicuously, with a shrewdness of vision and a dignity of gesture seldom equaled, to the welfare of their realms. Shush was an experimenter, a dreamer of splendid dreams. Hiram, as will be shown, was an organizer, a promoter of progress.

And Solomon, for his part, was steeped in wisdom.

The first indication of his extraordinary mental development was furnished when he was yet a mere youth. He was seated one day in a gilded buffet munching an apple, when two of his companions came clamoring around him, each demanding that he be given the remnant of the fruit which the Prince was about to cast aside. The situation was a delicate one. The applicants were both of them older and stronger than Solomon, and any favoritism on his side could only result in personal injury to himself at the hands of the disappointed claimant. The question might well have perplexed



supposedly wiser heads, but not so with Solomon. With great presence of mind he swallowed the disputed remnant, remarking in the vernacular as he did so:

"The apple a core it should not got yet!" [1]

The fame of this epoch making judgment spread broadcast over the land and also into neighboring countries, and people came from near and far to submit all manner of intricate questions to him, every one of which he solved without a moment's hesitation.

Solomon, although greatly embarrassed at first by this unforseen result of his nimble-wittedness, was quick to appreciate, nevertheless, the material advantages to his people of these constant pilgrimages to his court, and applied himself assiduously to the accumulation of useful information. One wonders less and less at the abnormalities of his behavior when one considers the appalling responsibility under which he labored until his death. Many a man condemned to bear the burden of omniscience which rested on his shoulders would have become insufferable. Solomon merely became infallible.

At the height of his career his wisdom excelled that of all nations, including the Senegambian.

[1] Hebron Papyrus, ch. 40, v. 6.

Over three thousand proverbs, maxims, epigrams and bon mots were credited to him. He was the author of more than one thousand songs, poems and nursery rhymes, to say nothing of countless anecdotes, fables and romances.

"In modern times," Heimweh remarks, "his royalties would have profited him infinitely more than his royalty."

He was an accomplished geologist, botanist, zoologist and entomologist, a proficient geographer, astronomer and necromancer, a finished mathematician, physician and musician.

6

Hiram VIII, King of Tyre, was short, fat, bow-legged and cross-eyed. His face was shaped like a full moon. With his large eyes, hooked nose, pursed up lips and fringe of whiskers he looked exactly like an owl. Having been born to the purple he had gone a step further and dyed himself the same color, a fact which presumably gave its name originally to his age. Once a week he immersed himself in steaming vats of the mixture, with the result that he had the appearance of being in a constant state of thundering apoplexy.

In other respects he had none of Solomon's per-

sonal idiosyncracies. He dressed simply in cloth of gold encrusted with emeralds, wore his hair straight back from his forehead in thirty braids tipped with crystal knobs in the customary manner, and sprinkled himself with attar of juniper.

He was, of course, excessively hot-tempered, and so profane did he become during his accesses of rage that it is alleged by contemporaries that the very air around him turned blue.[1] He could not abide unpunctuality, indecision or repetition. Heimweh states that he never postponed anything in his life. The sound of weeping drove him mad, and the sight of a melancholy face sent him into a fury. As may be imagined, the brunt of his choler fell upon his unfortunate wives who repeatedly offended his sensibilities and provoked his anger.

Of these ladies, eight of whom in turn braved the pitiless blight that descended upon each occupant of his throne, only one survived him, and that she did so was due not so much to her superiority as to the King's extreme old age which brought his career to a close before he found an opportunity of putting an end to her own. As for the other seven, five he caused to be decapitated because they presumed to

[1] This is denied by many authorities, however.

complain of sundry alliances in which he was entangled, one he strangled with his own hands for having kept him waiting five minutes one morning, and the last he shipped home to her parents for the good and simple reason that she bored him, her heart being the only part of her buried at Tyre.

In addition to these eight Queens, it seems, according to Heimweh, that:

". . . while he could not make Consorts of them, he nevertheless consorted with a large number of other ladies, which gave rise to the saying that Hiram was a great believer in consorted action. He may be said, indeed, to have gathered every rosebud that bloomed in his extensive gardens, and earned for himself the proud title of Husbandman of his People." [1]

That in spite of his outward appearance and murderous proclivities Hiram should have been so multifariously attractive to women speaks volumes for his personal charm and customary good humor, and justifies the appellation of Merry Monarch which was universally applied to him.

[1] For those desirous of further information on this subject, Gaston Poteau's delightful chapters, unfortunately unsuited to a work of this scope, are recommended.

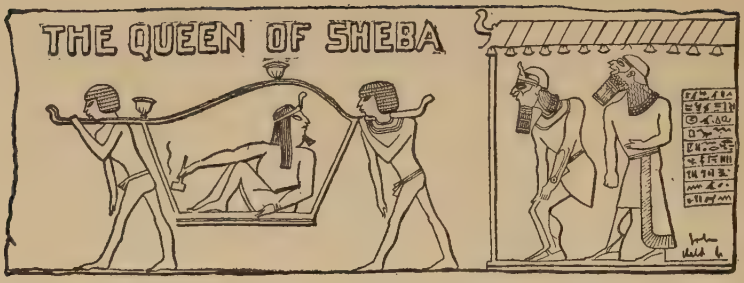
7

Aside from that Hiram was an intensely practical, ceaselessly industrious, shrewdly intelligent King. He preferred common sense to Solomon's wisdom, and had no use for the experimental dreams of Shush for which he substituted concrete and marble realities. Under his energetic and far-seeing rule Tyre reached a pinnacle of glory and prosperity which remained for centuries the envy of neighboring chroniclers who were constantly predicting her downfall. But Hiram had built on too firm a foundation.

And this foundation was shellfish. The precious mollusc [1] which infested the shores of the Tyrian Sea and from which was extracted and compounded by secret processes the famous purple dye for which all nations of the earth clamored. Hiram was quick to grasp the fundamental issues at stake. The prosperity of Tyre depended on her dye, the latter for its manufacture on a monopoly of the marine fauna above mentioned. The future of Tyre was within the ocean. Hiram understood that she must consequently be mistress upon its surface.

With this in view he transformed Old Tyre on

[1] *Murex rubricus.*



the mainland into an impregnable fortress surrounded by fifteen miles of walls. Then he turned his attention to the islands situated half a mile out from the shore and consolidated them into a site for his New Tyre enclosing an area two and a half miles in circumference.

"Verily," the Tyrian Envoy to the court of David remarked in those days, "it is time to retire!" [1]

It is estimated by contemporaries that more than thirty thousand workmen were drowned during the process, but the seemingly impossible was finally accomplished, Hiram himself working with the vanguard up to his waist in water, and being the first to step from island to island as the dividing channels were in turn abolished.

"Tyre has gone dry!" he exclaimed joyfully as the last spadeful of earth was put in.[2]

At the northern extremity of the new territory thus formed he established the Sidon Harbor, seventy thousand square yards in extent protected by gigantic dykes. At the southern end likewise he provided the Egyptian Harbor, affording a safe anchorage of eighty thousand square yards guarded by enormous moles and a breakwater two miles

[1] Hebron Papyrus, ch. 8, v. 19.
[2] *Ibid.*, v. 22.

long; the two harbors being connected by a canal cut through the center of the island. Sheshonk, the reigning Pharaoh, was so impressed by these operations that he suggested that Hiram join him in constructing a canal from the Tyrian Sea to the Red, but the latter, suspecting the promptings of Sheba in this offer, sent him a characteristic reply.

"Shovel your own canal," he wrote.[1]

These works once completed Hiram set the whole populace to building ships.

"Float a fleet a week!" was his incessant slogan.

Tyre became one vast teeming ship-yard. For a year, as one chronicler puts it, the sound of hammering filled all the interstices of space and progress through the streets was fraught with constant danger from the flying chips that darkened the sky. At the end of the year Tyre possessed the greatest navy the world has ever known, whose fleets went forth:

". . . always further and further afloat," as Heimweh says, "exploring, trading, colonizing and monopolizing."

Such was the nature of Hiram's contribution to the progress of his people, and of all his titles he

[1] Hebron Papyrus, ch. 12, v. 46.

was fondest of that which a grateful nation bestowed upon him, calling him its Sailor King.

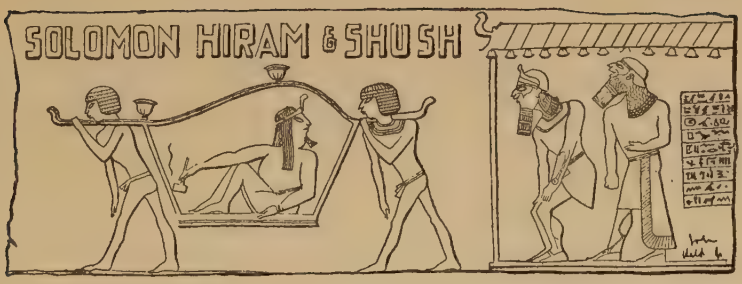
8

Which of the trio originated the great conference which took place at Tyre during the early months of the third year of the reign of Balkis is not easily determined at this late date. Some are of the opinion that it was Shush, desirous of enlisting the support of his allies against Sheba. Others lean towards the theory that the meeting was proposed by Solomon for the purpose of establishing a naval holiday to be observed by the three nations. The very slender internal evidence available all points, however, to the fact that it was Hiram who issued an invitation to Solomon alone, and that Shush on being advised of this suspicious circumstance promptly invited himself also, to the considerable annoyance of the other two.

That the conference was held at Tyre would seem to corroborate this view. A very brief fragment which still survives of a letter from Hiram to Solomon, written apparently at this time, likewise supports the latter.

". . . quiet time together," the document [1] states,

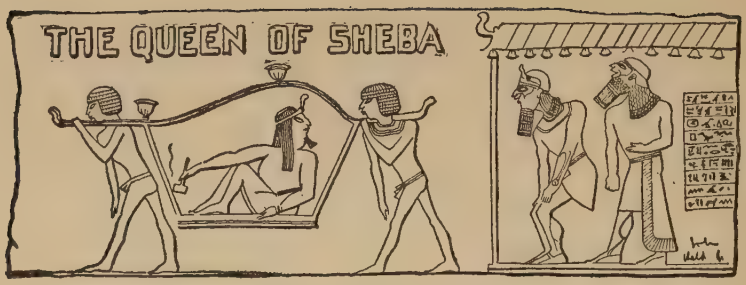
[1] Archives of Tyre, fragment 76.



"and decide on these matters by ourselves. My personal opinion is that if you scratch Sheshonk you'll find Sheba, and very probably Shush, and our little plan for Ezion will knock all that into a turban. . . ideal opportunity when all of our colleagues are rushing off to Sheba to visit that Balkis girl. Incidentally I hear she handed the brass banana to Shush. I'd go and see her myself if I were not so very much occupied; as for you, I suppose you're not interested in assuming any further domestic obligations, and I don't know as I blame you. . . you simply must come over. . . ."

Whatever the rest of the missive may have contained, two references in it—that to Sheshonk and that to "our little plan for Ezion"—would seem to prove quite conclusively the purport of these negotiations. Sheshonk, as has already been seen, was anxious to interest Hiram in the proposition of a canal to which the latter was opposed for political reasons. On the other hand, access to the Red Sea for his fleets could not fail to attract him. The result was undoubtedly the "little plan for Ezion."

In other words, Ezion-geber, the harbor on the Gulf of Akabah at the head of the Red Sea, and the southernmost city of Solomon's dominions, where



later on during that self-same year the latter constructed a powerful fleet from materials furnished by Hiram.

That this was the project referred to in the letter there can be no question, and that an attempt was made to put it into effect without the prior knowledge of Shush is also perfectly clear. His presence at the conference indicates, however, that he got wind of the scheme and made use of it to fill his own sails; and the fact that the "plan for Ezion" was in full operation a few months later, without any opposition from him, makes it certain that he received concessions at the conclave in return for his acquiescence.

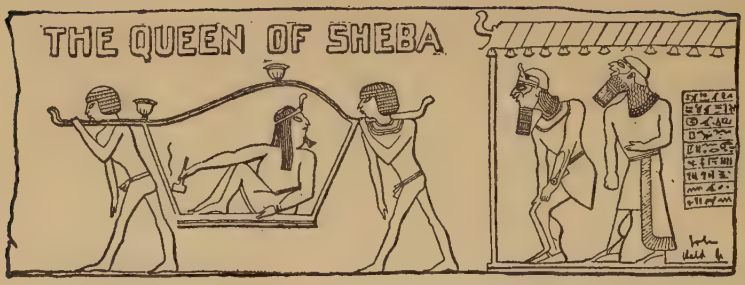
Heimweh, after painstaking researches, states that:

"The exact nature of these concessions is difficult to establish, the treaty concerning them having been of a most secret character. On the other hand it seems fairly evident that these concessions had to do with naval ratios in the Red Sea, and with the granting of a free hand to Shush in all matters pertaining to his future ventures on the mainland of Arabia. That in this was foreshadowed his long-standing intention of attacking Sheba there can have been no doubt in anyone's mind. . ."

9

At all events the conference occurred, amid scenes of unparalleled splendor, in the center of what has always subsequently been known in Minor Asiatic history as the Field of the Purple Cloth, owing to the vast quantities of this priceless material used in decorating the royal gathering place. Here, under a glittering canopy, their dazzling persons ablaze with chromes and gems and costly stuffs, they met, feasted and deliberated—Shush the Morose, Solomon the Magnificent and Hiram the Energetic—while the populace gave itself over to ceaseless rejoicings and entertainments in honor of their multitudinous retinues.

For two days they devoted their attention to the Ezion plan and to the necessary concessions to Shush, by which the fate of Sheba was to all intents and purposes sealed. Then for three weeks more, so Heimweh asserts, they prolonged their discussion, speculating heatedly on the personality, appearance and charms of her whom Hiram always referred to as "that Balkis girl." Solomon, in fact, composed one of his most famous songs in praise of her during that period, and Hiram decided to name a ship after her—all of this, as was well understood



between these two worthies, being done to annoy Shush who could not hear the name of Balkis spoken without having an attack of the hiccoughs.

And then an extraordinary thing seems to have happened.

A messenger arrived from Sheba who cast a letter down before Solomon, whereupon, smiling, the boy fell dead at his feet, having apparently run all the way from Marib to Tyre without a stop.[1] In any case the letter is authentic, announcing the startling fact that Balkis had determined to visit Solomon:

". . . for *very* VERY important reasons"—and was even now on her way to his court, and appealing to him under the laws of international hospitality to protect her journey.

"Such a nerve she got it yet!" Solomon is reported to have exclaimed.[2]

But the opportunity for further annoyance of Shush was not to be missed, and one can imagine the merry Hiram roaring at his colleague's discomfiture. For while he himself would not have hesitated to attack Sheba at a moment's notice if such

[1] Gorton has one of his usual fabulous tales in connection with this incident to the effect that the boy had actually died some time before but kept on running from force of habit.

[2] Archives of Tyre, fragment 80.

action had seemed profitable to him; and while, moreover, both he and Solomon were thoroughly aware of the inner meaning of the treaty just concluded with Shush, nevertheless here was an unexpected means of provoking the latter and depriving him, temporarily at least, of the fruits of his concessions which can only have appealed to their sense of humor.

The treaty of course must stand; not even Shush, for whom treaties were usually mere scraps of papyrus, would have dared to break this one in the presence of Tyre and Israel. By the same token the laws of international hospitality were absolutely inviolable. Balkis had announced her departure for Solomon's court—she was already his guest under the law. Her person was sacred, her realm unassailable!

"Balkis comes and goes in safety," Solomon decreed.

"I'll say she does!" Hiram added.

Shush was completely outwitted.

"Foiled again!" he muttered, and retired to his own tents to sulk.[1]

So the great conference broke up, amid gales of laughter from Hiram. . . .

[1] Archives of Tyre, fragment 82.

CHAPTER VI

PILGRIM'S PROGRESS

1

One of the greatest controversies arising from the many perplexities bequeathed to posterity by the reign of Balkis has raged for centuries over the question of the real motive for her visit to Solomon, aside from her natural curiosity to see with her own eyes the most talked of man in Asia Minor. A controversy which has engaged the attention not only of scholars and historians, but of men in all walks of life in every period of the world's subsequent history; and has precipitated by far the larger portion of the world's bitterest disputes—if one is to accept the verdict of one of the most erudite investigators of all time.

Gossoon, to whom reference is of course made, in his *Underlying Causes of History*,[1] has given to society the fruit of his exhaustive, and, as he himself admits in his preface, exhausting researches into the actual wellsprings of the great schisms which have rent mankind at various times. And it is his unshakable conviction that the endless and acrimonious speculation concerning the Queen's voy-

[1] A monumental work in twenty-four volumes now unfortunately out of print but obtainable in the more important libraries.

age is to be found at the roots of all these successive evils.

According to Gossoon [1] ". . . one may attribute to this one factor, to cite only a few cases at random, the merciless enmity of Rome against Carthage, the murder of Julius Cæsar, the advance of Attila upon Western Europe, the invasion of Britain by William the Conqueror, the age-long strife between the Guelphs and the Ghibellines, the massacre of the Huguenots, the execution of Mary Queen of Scots, the departure of the Puritans from England, the American Revolution, the Reign of Terror, Napoleon's divorce of Josephine, and the downfall of at least nine French ministries.[2]

For generations the human race has fought, burned and slaughtered to settle this atrabilious dispute, and the end is not yet. . . ."

Three disinct schools of opinion had sprung into being at so early a period even as the First Crusade, and did much to disrupt the harmony of effort of those ventures, until finally in more modern times the irreconcilable differences between these groups became crystallized into definite phrontisteries of thought which demand a brief analysis.

[1] Ch. 1, p. 2.

[2] This is denied by French authorities.

2

The first group, known as the Necessitarian School, whose greatest exponent is unquestionably Hornblower, hold to the theory that Balkis did not undertake the journey of her own accord, but was sent for by Solomon and coerced into convening with him; a belief expressed in their motto, Necessity is the mother of conventions. Among the really important partisans of this theory one finds Pontius Pilate, Ivan the Terrible, Martin Luther, Mary de Medici, Napoleon, Wagner, Lord Gladstone, Adelina Patti and George Washington.

The second category, often spoken of as the Heroics, has numbered among its disciples such personalities as Confucius, Julius Caesar, Brian Boru, Lucrecia Borgia, Queen Elizabeth, Cardinal Richelieu, Frederick the Great, the Duke of Wellington, Bismarck, Victor Hugo, Lord Byron and Florence Nightingale.

They, on their side, profess to find in the famous journey a startling proof of statesmanship on the part of Balkis and her advisers. To their minds Balkis was a heroine and Shenanikin a paragon of diplomacy.

The third class, usually referred to as the Abolitionists, a smaller clique of which, as might be expected, Heimweh is the acknowledged master, flatly deny that the visit to Solomon ever took place; or, if they grudgingly admit it in the face of scriptural testimony, it is only to assert that the visiting Queen was not Balkis but another. Of the more outstanding adherents to this view one may cite Cleopatra, Charlemagne, Abelard, Dante, Christopher Columbus, Montezuma, William Tell, Charlotte Corday, Lord Tennyson, Tolstoi and Queen Victoria.

3

One need have no hesitation whatever in stating once and for all that all three of these schools are hopelessly in error.

One has only to go to Gaston Poteau for the explanation. What, as he himself points out, Diogenes really spent his life searching for and Archimedes actually discovered when he sprang from his bath shouting "Eureka," Poteau in turn unraveled. Without for a moment detracting from Gossoon's work, the truth of which he regretfully admits, the Frenchman utterly refutes Hornblower, Transom, Heimweh and the rest of them,

and all their tenets, and proves the correctness of his deductions beyond peradventure.[1]

Poteau rests his case on the testimony of Talmud, Shenanikin and Balkis herself.

In Talmud's diaries of the period under consideration he finds the following instructive passage :[2]

"Verily, the Queen suffers exceedingly from loss of sleep, pondering throughout the night over the questions which do so vex her mind. It is her wish to visit Solomon, to lay these perplexing matters before him, and while I do not believe that any lasting good will come of it I do encourage her in this determination, deeming the journey may be beneficial to her."

This would seem to dispose of the Necessitarian theory, and, if anything, supports the Heroic point of view. Poteau, however, immediately quotes the following significant extract from Shenanikin:

"Lay late this morning, thinking of this and of that, and in particular of the Queen's dilemna, and as troublesome a problem as ever I did see.

[1] That the results of his enquiry have not hitherto been more widely accepted is merely an indication of the fact that the public mind is always more inclined to believe obscurely complicated rumors than simple, unadorned verities.

[2] *Diaries of a Court Physician,* tablet 372.

The Queen it seems is minded to visit Solomon and seek his advice on this question, if possibly he may have wisdom to explain wherein she hath erred. And she would have me tell her what I think of this plan, which I, poor wretch, cannot do, having no head for such matters.

All day thereafter at my stint, for which I had no zest whatever, and many come interrupting me with foolish prattle of what the Queen should do which did but confuse me. And so home and to bed." [1]

One is at a loss to see in this any trace of the Heroics' brilliant diplomat, any vestige of a heroic Queen displaying phenomenal statesmanship in the face of international complications—any indication, in fact, of any such emergency. There is no reference here, or in any of Shenanikin's writings, to Shush, or to Tyre, or to any impending danger to Sheba such as one would expect from the Regent if these matters had ever been under discussion. The Heroics are quite obviously cheering under the wrong window, as someone has said.[2]

But the paragraphs from the Queen's own diary which Poteau produces are even more conclusive.[3]

[1] *Mirrors of Marib,* ch. 18, p. 7.
[2] Attributed to Pocahontas. [3] Personal, vol. 89, left handed.

". . . I have thought VERY *deeply* about this thing," she says, "and I have decided that it must be due to some little fault of my own. We all have our faults of course, and it is so much better to *recognize* them and try to get the *better* of them than to remain *blind* to them, as this only leads to unhappiness and often prevents one from fulfilling one's *highest* mission in life, and of course one's mission in life is a very important thing.

But the trouble is I have tried and tried to think of a fault and I can't find *any*. I am not in the least conceited, but I can't help realizing that I am *peculiar* that way, because I really haven't any faults, and I always think that *false* modesty is worse in many ways than pride. And so I have decided to go and ask Solomon about it, since he has had so *much* experience and is really TREMENDOUSLY clever. I thought it was *awfully* cute of him to pretend to cut the baby in two when the mothers were quarreling about it last month, and he is always doing bright things like that, so they say.

I have already begun to put down questions I want to ask him and shall add to them a little every day so that I can really *profit* by my visit, and perhaps I can help him with some suggestions. I

always think there is nothing like an *intelligent* question to draw a person out. I find I already have four hundred and sixty-two of them on my list, and of course before I get to Jerusalem I'll have a *great* many MORE. . . ."

Can anyone seriously maintain that the foregoing does not entirely dispose of the Necessitarians, the Heroics, and the Abolitionists as well, at one stroke of the pen? Balkis went to Solomon in person, of her own free will, and for reasons far removed certainly from affairs of state, of which latter she does not breathe a word, she who was wont to fill pages with both hands concerning the most minute undertakings of her realm. Poteau makes this very clear.

"*Ce n'est pas pour des prunes,*" he writes in his witty style, "it is not for a dish of prunes that the Queen undertook this journey. It was not for reasons of state, nor was it to take the air. It was to consult Solomon on a personal matter—*une affaire tres delicate*—concerning her own character. What was the nature of this fault which she so desired to discover, the basis of that experience which rendered him so competent to enlighten her?

Why did *la petite Balkis* run at once to him *who had been married seven hundred times . . .*"

The answer "jumps into one's eyes," as he expresses it. Balkis went to Solomon to ask him why it was—in his opinion, who had discovered attractions in so many different women—that no man could be found who was willing to have *her* for his wife.

4

As may be imagined, the Queen's cortege for the journey was one of considerable splendor, and involved antecedent preparations of overwhelming magnitude. From contemporary outside sources one learns simply that she came to Solomon——

". . . with a very great train, with camels that bore spices, and very much gold and precious stones."

This is a coldly furnished forth description of the glittering pageant which filled her courtyards with the motley of a thousand rainbows, and poured out of Marib into the plain beyond for three days and nights. Never before perhaps, and certainly never since, has Arabia witnessed such a procession winding across its golden sands, over the hills and far away.

Two such processions, for of this host one part set out in advance of the other and proceeded by

In this panel the Queen is shown arriving at the gates of Jerusalem. Certain inaccuracies in the treatment of the scene prove that the original painting was composed from hearsay. Among the figures represented will be noted Abishai, riding at the head of the escort, Magog, conversing with the musicians, and in the right foreground, Ahishar pushing Benaiah forward to greet the royal visitor. While the picture is obviously not the work of an eyewitness of the event, nevertheless the accurate rendition of the fortifications of Jerusalem marks it as contemporary.

Under the gateway will be observed a charabanc full of Solomon's wives, in the depiction of whom the artist has very happily caught the mingled scorn and amazement with which these ladies viewed their master's royal guest. Some scholars are of the opinion that the two Queens in the front row facing Balkis are Ishmerion pointing out the guest of Panorama, and that the lady in the back row scratching her left shoulder is Ihlaf, but this is mere conjecture.

(See also page 96)

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(*See also page 96*)

Courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art

THE QUEEN OF SHEBA ARRIVING AT THE GATES OF JERUSALEM

land up the coast to Ezion-geber, there to await the Queen. This caravan, comprising five hundred camels and several hundred mules guarded by three thousand soldiers of all arms, carried with it nothing but the Queen's wardrobe and the bulk of her personal paraphernalia, contained in some two thousand pieces of baggage.[1]

The other section, which was infinitely more gorgeously caparisoned and more richly freighted than the rest, included the Queen's personal suite, attendants and scribes, the retainers attached to Sophonisba, who of course followed her royal mistress, and Balkis herself; an assemblage of several hundred personages, satellites and minions escorted by the entire Sheban Guards Brigade. Poteau describes the passage of this cavalcade as follows:

"The line of march was headed by the Heralds, mounted on brindled dromedaries and supported by three companies of Guards. After them in single file came the officials selected to constitute the Queen's staff, surrounded by their slaves, and riding in brilliantly ornamented litters covered

[1] For feminine students of the subject, Poteau's detailed paragraphs covering the list of these sartorial impedimenta will be found of engrossing interest.

with cloth of gold to protect them from the stains of travel.

There next appeared another company of Guards, especially detailed to watch over the ten gilded cages containing the Queen's cats, and preserve order in the twenty tanks of black goldfish from which these felines were fed, an extremely arduous task owing to the peculiar ferocity of this breed of the ichthyomorphic species.[1] The rear of this subdivision was occupied by the royal servants, hair-dressers and manicurists, under the immediate supervision of Sophonisba, and contained, besides, the Queen's ivory bath and the seventy-five white she-asses who provided the milk in which she immersed herself daily in that commodious receptacle.

After these, in her jeweled litter of state—fitted for the occasion with jade wheels rimmed with gold and drawn by thirty full-blooded zebras jingling with silver bells and diamond studded harness—preceded by a corps of air purifiers known as Dust Biters, and attended by her tablet carriers, time passers and cramp eradicators, the Queen, in a simple traveling dress of spun glass with her locks concealed by a close-fitting cap of elephant's

[1] *Ichthyosaurus Parvus.*

hair, feverishly dictating questions in preparation for her impending interview.

'It's the first seven hundred questions that are the hardest,' one of the scribes is reported to have informed Sophonisba.

The remainder of the train was made up of slaves, cooks, dream interpreters and scribes, together with the five hundred camels bearing the gifts for Solomon, and the other presents in kind." [1]

[1] The mere catalogue of these offerings, as listed on a contemporary Assyrian inscription recently unearthed, gives one a more intelligent conception of the stupendous character of this royal munificence than any labored descriptive paragraphs could afford.

". . . of horses from Togarmah," so the inscription reads, "fifty milk-white steeds with skins of satin and flowing silky manes, each with his harness of finest leather studded with gold.

And from the Isles that lie beyond the portals of the Sea, of ivory one hundred *manehs* of finest grain without any blemish; and of ebony yet another hundred, in diverse shapes fit for all manner of usage and polished like unto a burnished mirror.

And of lambs from Kedar one hundred, pure as snow; and of goats likewise a hundred, for a milking and a feasting; and of rams from that land yet another hundred to be an acceptable sacrifice.

And of spice from Sheba, fifty camel loads, all manner of spice therein for a seasoning and a sweetening; and of gum another fifty camel loads, and of gold yet another fifty camel loads.

And of precious stones from Sheba, fifty camel loads, to every five camels among them a different stone, and the names thereof were sardius, topaz, diamond, beryl, onyx, jasper, sapphire, emerald, carbuncle and jade.

This is the list of the gifts, nor has any been added thereto, all very fair and without any blemish, and cunningly fashioned for a

5

The Queen's train reached the coast at Hodeidah without mishap, it having been her intention to embark at that point and proceed by sea to Eziongeber there to rejoin the first section, and it was at the former port, according to Poteau, that one of the most ludicrous, and at the same time annoying, incidents of the voyage took place.

For it seems that camp having been pitched, while the camels and other beasts with their paraphernalia were being loaded onto barges specially prepared for their reception, when it came time to put the Queen's cats aboard, the latter were no sooner safely ensconced on the deck than the rats began to abandon the vessel in great haste, swarms of them scurrying ashore through every loophole and down every rope.

Whereupon the sailors, ever a superstitious lot, mutinied, declaring that the departure of rodents from a ship could only spell disaster in the near future, and refusing to take passage on such a fore-

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pleasure and a delight, which the Queen brought to the King, Solomon, for an offering. . . . "

As someone has remarked of travel in that day:

"It was not the heat but the cupidity that came high!"

doomed craft. The rebellion spread with great celerity throughout the entire fleet, the crews scrambling ashore almost as rapidly as the rats, and bade fair to disrupt all the arrangements for the journey.

Balkis, when apprised of this state of affairs, flew into a rage.[1]

"Oh rats!" she exclaimed, and caused herself to be carried down to the beach where she summoned the dripping sailory to her presence.

"Oh Queen, have a heart!" they implored her. "This ain't no time to sail on this here, now, Red Sea, no Ma'am!"

"And why not?" she enquired.

"It's because of them rats, Queen," they explained. "They've hooked it ashore, that's what, and that there galloping menagerie ain't worth a chirp in a gale of wind, no Ma'am."

"And what do you propose to do about it?" she demanded.

"Saving your presence, Ma'am," they informed her, "we ain't going to ship on no floating sarcophagus, not by Sheba we ain't! We're honest seafearing sailormen, we are, and we stand for our rights first and last!"

[1] *Annals of Sheba,* cylinder 9008.

"Aye, mates, that we do, by the great blistering barnacle! Yo ho and a bottle of gum. . ."

"But this is mutiny!" she warned them.

"Queen," they replied, "you guessed it the first time."

Things looked very black, but Balkis was not one to be abashed by circumstances. With a frown which, according to an eye-witness of the scene, would have split a rock in two she sprang from her litter and drew a line in the sand with her big toe.

"Sheba expects every man to do his duty," she informed them. "When I've finished counting up to ten those of you who haven't stepped across this line and returned to your ships will be put to death on the spot. Take your choice."

"Verily," they grumbled, "we are between the she-devil and the deep Red Sea."

"One, two, three, four—" Balkis began to count.

At the word ten every man had stepped across, and the great Hodeidah rat mutiny, or Whisker Rebellion as it was always called henceforth for some reason, was at an end.[1]

[1] Many of the sailors managed to capture rats which they took aboard with them in cages, thereby assuaging their fears to some extent, which suggests to Steinkopf the origin of mascots; the whole episode, moreover, furnishing in his opinion the basis for the ceremonies of Crossing the Line still held on shipboard to this day, in

6

A departure was finally made, amid great demonstrations of enthusiasm from the beach, and the fleet proceeded in a leisurely manner up the coast, tacking this way and that before the varying winds, and resorting to the banked tiers of oars when a calm caught the heavy-laden barges drifting. Poteau states that:

"The presence aboard of so much live stock unaccustomed to watery locomotion, and consequently assailed by terrors and other discomforts of a gastronomic nature, resulted in a constant neighing and hee-hawing, a perpetual bleating and baaing and bellowing, an uninterrupted whiffling and burbling of camels, which could be heard for miles and drew men, women and children out from the coastwise villages on both shores of the Red Sea, marveling at this unusual din upon the surface of the waters.

Added to this the intermittent mewing and purring of the Queen's cats, the noise of the musicians making merry with their trumpets and drums, the ceaseless whirring of gambling wheels, and the

which, as he points out, the process of shaving plays an important part and undoubtedly has some connection with the aforementioned reference to whiskers.

singing of the sailors at their chanties all combined to produce a terrifying cacophony in the midst of which the ship's companies sought such sleep as they might achieve, and which brought the fish gaping from the depths, as one chronicler has said.

As for Balkis, she seems to have spent her time sorting out her question tablets and scrambling about in the rigging to her heart's content. The sailors, already considerably disturbed by the abnormal features of this voyage, were at first in great trepidation at the sight of the Queen walking carelessly from mast to mast along the ropes and winding herself around the spars, but they gradually became accustomed to the spectacle and derived much innocent amusement from it."

So the days and nights passed and Coomfidab and Jeddah were astern, and then Yemho, Aboonood and Moilah; the waters narrowed under the shadow of Sinai and the Gulf of Akabah was entered, until finally on a placid morning the shining minarets of Ezion-geber came spiring over the horizon to greet the approaching armada.

7

The Queen's barge anchored in the outer harbor, while the accompanying vessels were being made

fast at the piers to be unloaded of their freight, and a great concourse of officials, including the high dignitaries of Ezion and the chiefs of her own caravan who were awaiting her, put out in small boats to do her homage and offer suitable tokens of loyalty and respect.

The Address of Welcome itself was unfortunately never delivered, owing to an accident to the craft in which it was being conveyed, as a result of which the majority of the marble slabs on which it had been inscribed were lost overboard and sank to the bottom of the Bay, together with the Captain of the Port of Ezion and a number of other minor personages; but the Freedom of the City was successfully presented in a diamond casket and graciously received by Balkis, who thereupon entertained her visitors at a gorgeous banquet which is reported to have lasted three nights and two days.

At last, on the fifth morning—the officials having by then, according to Poteau, recovered sufficiently to be taken back to land and prepare for her formal reception—the royal barge was towed into the inner harbor through waters strewn with roses of Sharon, and Balkis went ashore, amid the mingled strains of the Sheban national anthem and the vociferous outcries of a frenzied populace, where she was

greeted by her recent guests and by the Envoy attached to her person by Solomon as his special representative.[1]

The Queen stopped to inspect the guard of honor drawn up on the pier, exchanged a few kindly words with a veteran of the Philistine War, and then drove through the principal streets behind her prancing zebras between closely packed ranks of cheering humanity to the Governor's palace where a state luncheon was served, at the end of which she is supposed to have made her famous observation, to the effect that:

"We, who are about to diet, salute you!" [2]

The remainder of the day was spent in a review of the garrison, during the course of which Balkis conferred the Order of the Ivory Bath on a number of officers and was elected Honorary Captain of

[1] As for this Envoy, a certain Magog who appears to have borne some resemblance to Colossus, Poteau is also responsible for the statement that:

"This personage performed his duty with great zeal—*avec beaucoup de conviction*—and having been attached to the Queen's person by Solomon as his representative, he also quite evidently became very much attached to her on his own account, a fact to which she does not seem to have been entirely insensible."

From Gorton one learns that ". . . it was common talk around Ezion that the Envoy was all 'magog' over Balkis!"

[2] *Annals of Sheba,* cylinder 9618.

the Ezion Legion, and in the late afternoon her convoy set out through the North Gate for Jerusalem, increased by Magog's voluminous suite and by her own sumptuary caravan.

8

From Ezion the great host traveled slowly northward through Edom, arranged in a hollow square of which the Queen's litter, attended now by Magog, was the center, and disposed in ranks of two hundred camels abreast the better to guard against stragglers. On through the Desert of Zin, past Mount Hor to Kadesh, and ever onward to Zephath at the southern extremity of the Dead Sea, or the Great Salt Lake as it was better known. Thence, bearing westward, to Arad, and then northward again along the black stone paved road until Hebron was reached, where Balkis rested for two weeks while she sent couriers to Solomon with the news of her near approach.

Poteau says that ". . . the enthusiasm over her coming passed all bounds. All along the line of march the towns and villages were hung with garlands and decorated with triumphal arches; and the route which she followed was lined with spectators come from every corner of Israel, many of

whom had been encamped on the spot for weeks, sometimes for months, awaiting her arrival.

Her appearance was greeted everywhere with frantic acclamations, and the magnificence of her enormous retinue aroused the bewildered, although always shrewdly appraising, admiration of the simple country folk.

'*Oy, oy!*' they cried continuously. 'From gold she got it everything! What did she done she should get it so much *mezumeh?* See now, zebras yet!'

It is estimated that Balkis received two hundred and forty deputations, accepted the freedom of more than three hundred communities, tasted some six hundred and fifty bowls of goat's milk, patted three thousand four hundred and seventy-six little girls on the head, and had her hand kissed twelve thousand times, so much so, in fact, that her knuckles became calloused from such indiscriminate osculation."

At the end of two weeks Balkis set forth with a chosen escort on the last stages to Jerusalem, leaving the bulk of her establishment to follow a day later, and taking with her only her immediate attendants, the nobles and Heralds, one each of every kind of present for Solomon, her wardrobe,

and of course her cats. On to Solomon's Pools, past Bethlehem to Rachel's Grave on which she deposited a memorial tablet, and so finally at sunset into the Plain of Ephraim where she pitched camp.

At the further side of the Valley of Hinnom spread before her, high above its four hills all aglow in the crimson light from the west, Balkis gazed long and rapturously upon Jerusalem, the Royal City of David. And on the summit of Ophel, in the porch of the House of Lebanon, summoning his wisdom against the unknown morrow, Solomon sat far into the night watching the twinkling lights of her hundred camp fires . . .

CHAPTER VII

THE YOUNG VISITOR

1

The dawn came with a throbbing of drums, ushering brilliant sunlight into a sky trembling with brazen music, and with the fremescent chirm of gathering hosts.

At an early hour, down from Ophel through the Zion quarter, the entire Pelethite Corps in full marching paint—green striped with yellow—under the command of the veteran Abishai, passed on their way to the Ephraim Gate to line the approaches of the city and maintain order among the hurrying thousands jostling one another for coigns of vantage along the route of the royal entry. All traffic south, and west on the Joppa Causeway, was stopped, and incoming caravans diverted north to the Acra and Bezetha gates.

Considerable difficulty was experienced at first, so Poteau relates, in clearing the Bethlehem road, but after several hundred spectators had been crushed to death and otherwise incapacitated by the chariots provided for such emergency, some semblance of discipline was finally achieved; and the good-natured throngs submitted to the patrols, who adopted the simple plan of cutting off the feet of

those whose enthusiasm caused them to push forward in too great proximity to the established lines, the order of the day reading:

"If anyone's foot offend you, cut it off." [1]

His arrangements once completed, Abishai himself proceeded to the Queen's camp with a guard of honor consisting of a Composite Regiment picked from every division in the corps, each man of which possessed the Armageddon Medal as well as a galaxy of other stars and decorations which almost entirely concealed his breastplate—as imposing a body of men, Poteau asserts, as ever went over the top of a wall.

In the meantime the crowds assembled before the Gate were amusing themselves with thumbnail sketches of Balkis done on brick by the hawkers, and pointing out, quite inaccurately in the majority of cases, the celebrities as they arrived one by one in gorgeous litters to take up their stations.

"*Oy oy!*" they cried constantly. "See now, such a one yet!"

2

Meanwhile in the Queen's camp a corresponding activity of preparation obtained, and it was quite

[1] Hebron Papyrus, ch. 38, v. 7.

evident to all concerned that Balkis would be shamelessly late. In the first place, having spent two thirds of the night in the contemplation of Jerusalem, when the time came to awaken her Balkis could not be aroused from her sleep. Sophonisba finally solved the problem by tickling the soles of her feet with an ostrich feather, a liberty which none but the privileged nurse would have presumed to take, but much precious time had already been lost.

In addition to this a whole series of accidents occurred which threw the entire establishment into a state of dithering confusion. For the first time in their careers the she-asses refused to give a sufficient quantity of milk for the Queen's bath; six of the nobles discovered that their personal baggage had been left behind at Ezion and committed suicide; and, as though this had not been enough, fifty of the Queen's cats broke loose from their cage and hurled themselves into the nearest goldfish tank, where they were promptly bitten to death by these bloodthirsty carnivora.

The bulk of these mishaps were concealed from the Queen, but, what with one thing and another, she was only trying on her four hundred and sixty-first dress in an endeavor to decide on a suitable

garment for the ocasion when Abishai arrived with the escort.

"Oh dear!" she exclaimed. "I'm a perfect sight!"

It was Sophonisba who pointed out to her that as long as she remained in her actual condition she was entirely too much of a sight, no matter how perfect, to do anything whatsoever of a public nature, and between them an acceptable costume was finally selected, while the soldiery were being entertained by a distribution of edible gum stamped with the Queen's monogram.

". . . a clinging one-piece suit of green scales," so Poteau describes the costume in question, "taken from the head of the Arabian puffing lizard,[1] in the manufacture of which three million four thousand nine hundred and fifty-eight of these animals were slaughtered, possessing as they did only two such scales, one behind each ear. Over this, draped from her shoulders in graceful folds, she carried a cloak of emeralds mounted on strings of pearls. Her feet, embellished with anklets and rings, rested on ivory sandals, and her fingers were encased in hinged sheaths of jade encrusted with gems and fastened to her bracelets with ropes of diamonds.

Upon her brow she wore a gold head-dress in the

[1] *Vermiculus furiosus.*

shape of a crescent, embossed with precious stones and surmounted by a crest of peacock's feathers spread out fanwise, from the horns of which twenty chains of jewels, ten on each side, fell in loops of varying lengths to rejoin her necklace of sardius and ruby supporting the great blazing pendant of the Order of the Ivory Bath. Under the flaming splendor of her salamander hair the long emerald earrings that reached to her pale shoulders gleamed like sunlit leaves in a forest glade."

3

The presentation of Abishai having finally taken place, the guard of honor stuck their gum inside their helmets and Balkis gave the signal for departure.

"Well, where do we go from here?" she enquired.

Preceded by the guard, in the midst of which the Heralds on their dromedaries attracted universal attention, she went forth from her camp in an open litter of solid gold borne by two hundred slaves, seated on an ivory throne inlaid with emeralds. Abishai and Magog rode beside her, glaring jealously at each other across the litter, so Gorton asserts, while behind her came her retinue of nobles, the Lords Hamdani, Istakhri, Idrisi and

others; the six missing ones having escaped the Queen's notice in the general excitement.

Down the Bethlehem road they went, amid manifestations of popular delight which threatened at times to interrupt her progress so eagerly did the people press forward, and which required the most ruthless swordplay on the part of the troops to quell; and so finally to the open space before the Ephraim Gate, now filled with a great concourse of higher officials, where the demonstrations of welcome from the populace bordered on the delirious——

". . . hats, shoes, lunch baskets and even babies being hurled into the air," according to Poteau.

Here a halt was made, while the Princes and dignitaries were presented to the Queen and permitted to kiss her hand.[1] Among these personages may be cited Hoshea, Prince of Ephraim, representing the Princes of the Tribes; Ahishar, the master of the royal household; Ahithophel and Jehoiada, the royal councilors; and Benaiah, the commander of the Aggressive Expeditionary

[1] Gorton insists that several of them were so charmed by her person that no sooner had they passed before her than they made their way to the end of the line again, and that in this manner not a few of them were presented to her three and even four times, but there is no record of this in any contemporary chronicle.

Forces, known as Black Benaiah the Lion Killer. To each of them Balkis said:

"So pleased to meet you, lovely day, isn't it?" and for those who filed past on her left she added, "excuse it please, the hand nearest the heart you know!"

They for their part merely replied:

"Greetings, Queen, welcome to our city," and were hurried on by those behind.

At the last, in answer to frenzied appeals from the multitude, Balkis arose from her seat and kissed her hands in all directions, finally addressing a few words to the cheering thousands.

"Hello everybody!" she cried. "All I can say at this moment is *Israel go bragh!*" [1]

Whereupon, with a loud crashing of cymbals—the great four-man *metsiltaim* and *tseltselim*—and a joyous clarioning from the long straight metal *hatsotserah,* the cavalcade was put in motion once more, and Balkis passed in solemn majesty through the ponderous portals of the Ephraim Gate, guarded by the massive Tower of Furnaces, into the City of David to where, on the high summit of Ophel, one awaited her coming with anxious heart beats, for all the immensity of his wisdom . . .

[1] Sheban for Long live Israel.

CLEARING THE APPROACHES TO JERUSALEM ON THE DAY OF THE QUEEN'S ARRIVAL

From a contemporary painting

4

One must turn to Poteau for a detailed account of her triumphal passage through the city; space will not permit, mere duplication of his glowing paragraphs will not justify, a repetition of that famous description—the garlanded, flower strewn streets; the festoons of humanity literally clinging to the cornices of the flag draped buildings like clustered bees at a swarming; the continuously swelling storm of applause which rolled like a rising tide before her; the magnificent bearing of the Cherethite Corps who lined the approach to the palace under the command of Eleazar, the victor of the Battle of the Barley Field; the dazzling splendor of her cortege as it wound slowly up the hill; the entrancing loveliness of the slender little figure in the shimmering litter, bowing and smiling, and clapping her little hands together in an ecstasy of tremulous enchantment.

"*Oulala!*" she kept exclaiming to herself over and over again in Sheban. *"Oulala, oulala. . . ."* [1]

It is during this ride that Benaiah is supposed to have remarked that——

"Verily, Delilah has nothing on Balkis."

[1] Approximately, What do you know about that?

To which the witty Ahishar is reported to have replied:

"Verily, Balkis has practically nothing on herself!" [1]

5

Solomon, meanwhile, was awaiting the Queen—attired from head to foot in crimson fabrics edged with gold, his body fresh from the hands of his barbers, painters, valets and perfumers—seated in the porch of the House of Lebanon, that imposing edifice one hundred cubits in length by fifty wide, paneled, beamed and roofed with cedar, from which he commanded a view of the open courtyard in which Balkis must shortly alight.

He was surrounded by the Envoys, the Captains and Princes of Israel and their retinues, and his own body servants and pages, while at his elbow stood a privileged group including Adoniram, the appraiser of tribute, his tutor Jehiel, and the mighty Shammah, who had fought against the Philistines under David. At one side a *sharim* of five hundred singers, led by Jeduthun in person, alternated with the *nogenim* of three hundred

[1] Hebron Papyrus, ch. 40, v. 9.

players, conducted by Asaph, in a continuous antiphony of mellisonant diapasons.

"On the opposite side," so Poteau relates, "in marked contrast to this harmony, a specially constructed stand sheltered the King's seven hundred wives, whose gaudy coloration and vivaciously argumentative chatter gave to this structure the appearance of an aviary."

Whatever views they may hold on other subjects, Necessitarians and Heroics alike are united in admitting that Solomon was in a state of uncontrollable fidgets during these last few minutes prior to his meeting with Balkis.

Gorton is of the opinion, for instance, that the King chose crimson garments that morning, requiring a similar pigmentation of his features, in order to conceal his embarrassed blushes ". . . arising either from a diffidence which he experienced at the necessity of receiving her with appropriate enthusiasm in the presence of his wives, or from a reluctance to have the latter taken by Balkis as a criterion of his good taste." [1]

[1] Transom suggests a possibly more reasonable cause, to wit, an apprehension on Solomon's part that the Queen would turn out to be "a quite impossible person," as he expresses it, who by her behavior and lack of breeding would shock the susceptibilities of his somewhat straightlaced capital. He was not unaware, of course,

And then, as Poteau himself points out, rumors had undoubtedly reached him of the camel loads of question tablets on which Balkis had been working while he slept!

At all events for one reason or another it is certain that Solomon was extremely nervous and spent his time, so one learns from Hornblower, ". . . fussily finding fault with his appearance, and feverishly running through his Books of Deportment and the pages of his favorite proverbs and epigrams."

And then with an accompanying roar of cheers and blaring of bands the head of the column filed into the courtyard; the Cherethites formed in massed ranks on either side of the stairs; Benaiah, and Hoshea, and Ahishar and the rest came hastening up the steps to the King's foot-stool. Balkis had arrived.

"What is she like?" Solomon found time to ask.

"Every inch a Queen, dressed in chromatic scales," Ahishar told him, but there was no opportunity for further questioning.

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of her semi-insane, semi-acrobatic, parentage, and he had heard of her youthful escapades and contortionistic propensities, and it may well be that Solomon ". . . was all of a twitter," to quote Transom again, "lest Balkis should come tumbling up the stairs to greet him, or take to running around the ledges of his palace."

The Queen's litter had reached the foot of the stairs, and she was at that moment alighting from it, leaning on the arms of Magog and Abishai. A swift flutter of the hands to her jeweled headdress, an appraising glance around her at all this magnificence summoned to do her honor, and Balkis turned to the ascent before her, searching for her host.

Solomon arose and went down the steps to meet her.

For a few breathless seconds they stood face to face in silence, each no doubt revising previously conceived estimates of the other, and then Abishai came forward.

"Queen," he announced, in his abrupt soldierly manner, "shake hands with King Solomon!"

"So good of you to come," Solomon murmured, as he stooped to kiss her finger tips. "Hope deferred maketh the heart sick, but when the desire cometh it is a tree of life!"

"Oh, how sweet!" Balkis exclaimed. "You must let me copy it down some time."

"Just a little thing of my own," Solomon informed her deprecatingly.

"But I think it's lovely," Balkis insisted. "And your city is simply grand! Of course I love Marib,

but if I couldn't live there I'd like to live in Jerusalem, if you know what I mean?"

"Queen," Solomon assured her, "you don't know the half of it!" and with graceful courtesy he led up to the porch.[1]

6

At the top of the stairs Balkis paused for a moment and narrowly inspected the grand-stand containing the King's Ladies.

"Those are your wives, I suppose," she remarked to Solomon, who would have hurried her on. "Do you mind if I look at them—hum, some of them must have been really quite pretty at one time."

It is at this point in his narrative that Poteau indulges in a statement which, were it not for his habitual veracity of relation, one would be tempted to disbelieve.

"In spite of the music," he says, "the remark made by the Queen was overheard by Ichneumon of Egypt who promptly repeated it to Pilaff of Tripoli, and in a very few seconds it had been translated into two hundred and thirty-three languages and gone the rounds of the crowded

[1] Hebron Papyrus, ch. 40, v. 22.

benches. Whereupon, as one woman, all seven hundred of the King's wives turned to Balkis and stuck out their tongues at her."

But the episode went unobserved by the Queen who had already passed on Solomon's arm into the interior of the House of Lebanon, and was admiring the lofty apartment with its triple tier of square windows and its four rows of cedar pillars, and running eagerly from pillar to post examining the five hundred shields of beaten gold suspended upon its walls.

"I'm awfully fond of gold, aren't you?" she asked Solomon. "It brightens up the corners of a room so, don't you think?"

"There is gold and a quantity of rubies," he replied, "but the lips of knowledge are a precious jewel. How much better is it to get wisdom than gold, and to get understanding rather to be chosen than silver!"

"Yes, of course, that's true, too true," Balkis agreed. "And so well put."

"Just a little thing of my own," Solomon murmured.[1]

Introductions having been effected, Balkis summoned her slaves and laid her gifts before the King

[1] Hebron Papyrus, ch. 40, v. 39.

which were received with loud exclamations of wonderment on the part of the throng and committed into the hands of the proper officials for safe keeping.[1]

"Some of the things are really rather sweet," Balkis kept telling them, "but of course it's the spirit behind the gift that counts, isn't it?"

Whereupon the irrepressible Ahishar remarked behind his hand to Benaiah that:

"Every little bit added to what you've got makes just a little bit more! Just a little thing of my own. . ." [2]

A tour of inspection was then made through the Porch of Pillars and the Porch of the Throne, around the columned courtyards, and into the royal palace—a massive building of costly hewed stones sawed with saws within and without from cellars to copings, some of them ten cubits square, and beamed with cedar—where a state luncheon was served on the gold plate.[3]

[1] The gold and jewelry to Azmaveth, guardian of the major and minor profits, the gum and spices to Joash, custodian of the cellars of oil, the varied equipment to Jehonathan, janitor of the royal storehouses and castles, and the animals to Shitrai and Obil, wardens of the herds and camels.

[2] *Memoirs of Benaiah,* fragment 42

[3] Poteau states that ". . . throughout these ceremonies Balkis was simply an animated exclamation point, this symbol replacing for

This luncheon, followed by the gala banquet that evening, ushered in a round of functions which lasted for three weeks and piled peelings on ossified remnants, according to Ahishar; and which drove the unfortunate provender official for the month to his grave—the worthy Ahimaaz, from Napthali, who was married to Solomon's daughter, Basmath.[1]

Then for another three weeks Balkis entertained the court in her own camp at a series of acrobatic displays and lavish feasts which included a private luncheon for the King's wives, no record of which unfortunately is available, although Poteau asserts that:

"It is rumored that at the close of the entertainment a large ornament in the shape of a bell was presented to Balkis by Ichneumon and hung

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the time being the question mark which ordinarily expressed her mental attitude towards her surroundings.

Indeed, under the stress of all these wonders, she ventured to make a quite passable epigram of her own, to the effect that:

'Solomon dwelt in marvel halls!'

Everything, it seemed, was WONDERFUL, the buildings were simply GRAND, the food was so GOOD, the six hundred pages were just SWEET, Shammah and Benaiah were DARLINGS, Solomon himself was too LOVELY FOR WORDS AND SO CLEVER——
! ! ! ! ! !"

[1] Gorton insists that her name was in reality Bismuth, but this view is not supported by the majority of genealogists.

around her neck amid gales of laughter from the spectators, the inner significance of which the Queen does not ever seem to have grasped. . ." [1]

7

One may not leave the account of those first weeks in Jerusalem without some slight reference to the Queen's own private impressions of Solomon, recorded in her intimate diaries.[2] Pilaster had been worthy of underlining and Colossus had earned his scattered capitals, but in the case of her host Balkis found it necessary to make use exclusively of the latter calligraphy in order to express the immensity of her fascinated admiration.

"SOLOMON IS A BEAR," she writes in one place. "OF COURSE HE IS TERRIBLY FUNNY TO LOOK AT AND VERY FUSSY ABOUT HIS CLOTHES, BUT I ALWAYS THINK IT IS SUCH A MISTAKE TO JUDGE PEOPLE BY APPEARANCES, AND WHEN YOU REALLY GET TO KNOW HIM, YOU SIMPLY CAN'T HELP LOVING HIM. HE IS SO POLITE, AND SO UNCONCEITED ABOUT ALL HIS

[1] This is indignantly denied by the Heroic School.
[2] Solomon, vol. 52, left handed.

WONDERFUL THINGS, AND SO SWEET TO HIS HORRID WIVES."

Concerning the latter Balkis observes:

"Solomon's wives are a pretty *sad* bunch on the whole. Of course with so many of them you can't expect them all to be whirlwinds, but I was surprised to find how FEW of them can hold a candle to me, but then I suppose I'm *exceptional* that way.

Ichneumon is the best-looking one, and I daresay she was really quite beautiful in her day, in that washed-out Egyptian style which some people admire although I can't *stand* it myself. Pilaff is perfectly AWFUL, so fat and greasy. Psha is a disagreeable little cat, and so stuck up although she's only a Persian and her family were really nothing at all. Panorama is rather sweet, but hasn't any brains to speak of and giggles all the time. I should think Solomon would go *crazy* when he's with her. I understand he is *very* MUCH interested just now in a Shulamite girl, but of course that's supposed to be a SECRET."

Of his wisdom she remarks elsewhere that:

"SOLOMON IS REALLY TREMENDOUSLY CLEVER. HE IS ALWAYS SAYING THE CUTEST THINGS, AND HE CAN TALK ON ANY SUBJECT AND

MAKE IT INTERESTING. HE WAS TELLING ME THE OTHER DAY ABOUT WHAT REALLY HAPPENED TO SAMSON WHEN THAT DELILAH WOMAN GYPPED HIM, AND IT WAS SO FASCINATING AND SOME OF IT TERRIBLY FUNNY. I WISH I COULD REMEMBER WHAT IT WAS THAT SAMSON SAID WHEN HE PULLED DOWN THE TEMPLE OF DAGON — SOMETHING ABOUT COLUMNS RIGHT AND COLUMNS LEFT AND BEING THE FIRST COLUMNIST IN HISTORY — BUT I NEVER CAN REMEMBER STORIES UNLESS I WRITE THEM DOWN RIGHT AWAY.

AND THEN HE IS ALWAYS SO MODEST ABOUT ALL THE WONDERFUL THINGS HE SAYS, AND TRIES TO PASS THEM OFF AS THOUGH THEY WERE REALLY QUITE INSIGNIFICANT, AND I DON'T THINK HIS COURT REALLY APPRECIATE THEM AT ALL. BUT I RESPOND SO QUICKLY TO THINGS OF THAT SORT THAT I CAN ALWAYS SEE THE BEAUTY IN EVERYTHING THAT

HE SAYS EVEN THOUGH I DON'T ALWAYS UNDERSTAND IT RIGHT AWAY, BECAUSE OF COURSE SOME OF HIS SAYINGS ARE ENTIRELY TOO DARK FOR POOR ME, BUT HE IS AWFULLY PATIENT ABOUT REPEATING THEM."

In another paragraph she states that:

"I LOVE HIM VERY, VERY MUCH, IN A WONDERFUL SPIRITUAL WAY, AND I FEEL THAT OUR MINDS WERE SPECIALLY MADE FOR EACH OTHER. I DON'T KNOW HOW TO EXPRESS IT EXACTLY, BUT I THINK HIS SPIRIT CALLED TO MINE ACROSS THE DESERT AND THAT IS REALLY WHY I CAME TO HIM. I KNOW OF CASES WHERE TWINS HAVE DONE THAT, AND PERHAPS MENTALLY WE ARE TWINS TOO. I TOLD THAT TO AHISHAR YESTERAY AND HE LAUGHED AND SAID 'YES, GOLD DUST TWINS.' HE IS SO WITTY.

I DON'T THINK SOLOMON IS VERY HAPPY, AND SOMETIMES WHEN I TALK TO HIM HE LOOKS AS THOUGH HE WERE REALLY IN GREAT PAIN,

AND I HOPE THAT BEFORE I GO I CAN DO SOMETHING TO HELP HIM, BECAUSE I KNOW THAT I HAVE AN UNDERSTANDING HEART IF HE WILL ONLY CONFIDE IN ME.

Perhaps it has something to do with that Shulamite girl. I must get Benaiah to tell me more about it, as he seems to be awfully up on everything that's going on and is *quite* a DARLING, although he is frightfully *rude* to Abishai and Magog and Hoshea and the others when they come around. I'm very much afraid they're all falling in love with me, poor dears, but *what* can I do?

I sometimes wish that I were not so *terribly* ATTRACTIVE to married men. . ."

8

So the weeks passed in reciprocal festivities and the time came for the Queen's official interview with Solomon. Poteau has interesting accounts of the elaborate preparations made by both parties for this function—the setting forth of Solomon's Library of Knowledge, in which every conceivable question, from Who mends the crack of dawn to What keeps night from breaking when it falls, was answered;

the gathering together in classified piles of the Queen's question tablets; and the furnishing of the apartment in which the debate was to occur, including the installation of a temporary dormitory for the scribes and attendants.

The Six Day Cyclopedic Race, as it was always referred to subsequently, took place in the Porch of the Throne, or of Judgment, a beautiful structure made entirely of cedar in which the King was accustomed to render decisions; in the presence of Jehoshaphat, the recorder of answers, Ahiah and Elihoreph, the chief scribes, the advisers whom Balkis had brought with her, Rabbi Ben Ezra, Omar Khayam and others, and her corps of ear scratchers and tongue rubbers.

"The Queen," Poteau relates, "sat on her throne which had been conveyed for the purpose from her camp, facing Solomon who occupied his own judgment seat—a superb chair of ivory overlaid with gold, the arms of which were formed by two great beasts, and which was reached by a flight of six steps, each of them flanked with lions, leading up to his solid gold foot-stool. At the further end of the Porch an orchestra of *chalils, shophars, mashrokitha, tophs, sistra,* timbrels and sackbuts were on duty night and day to furnish soft music during the

sometimes quite lengthy intervals of thought between questions."

As was customary in such cases, the meeting opened with an address by the host in which every known branch of knowledge was touched upon and set forth for the edification of the guest. As may be imagined, with such a lecturer as Solomon this feature of the program took up considerable time,[1] and covered every subject connected with the earth, the sea and the sky, the animal, mineral and vegetable kingdoms, the beautiful and the damned, and the history of the human race from the Age of Innocence down to the Dangerous Ages, including the mysterious Wasted Generation——

". . . all of it assembled," so Poteau states, "in compact form in what was known as Solomon's *Outline of History, or Wells of Information,* two cosmic volumes embellished with charts."

The lecture once terminated, the second part of the program was entered upon to which a privileged public was admitted. Three black pennies having been flipped according to custom, Solomon won the toss and prepared to ask his questions. As will be seen below from the stylographic reports of the proceedings the King's riddles give evidence of

[1] Some chroniclers estimate as much as two and a half days.

careful preparation and seem to have troubled Balkis not a little.

SOLOMON: "Some hunters went hunting. They said afterwards, 'What we caught we threw away, and what we did not catch we kept.' What were they hunting?"

A long pause.

BALKIS: "Oh dear!"

Pause.

BALKIS: "I don't know."

SOLOMON: "Fleas."

Laughter among the Shebans.

BALKIS: "Aren't you horrid!"

SOLOMON: "A temple rests upon a single column encircled by twelve cities. Each city has thirty buttresses. Each buttress has two women, one white and one black, that go round it in turns. Solve the riddle."

BALKIS: "I'm all mixed up already. What was the first part?"

Question repeated. A long pause.

BALKIS: "How many buttresses did you say?"

Question repeated. A long pause.

BALKIS: "Go ahead, I'll bite!"

Laughter. Suppressed.

SOLOMON: "The temple is the world, the column the year, the twelve cities are the months, the thirty buttresses are the days, the two women light and darkness."

BALKIS: "Oh, but you're cheating!"

Sensation in the Porch.

SOLOMON: "Huh?"

BALKIS: "Some of the months have thirty-one days. Of course if I'd known that——"

Loud laughter among the spectators. Suppressed. Objection sustained by the recorder. Exception taken by Solomon. Noted.

A SHEBAN: "Hooray our side!"

RECORDER: "Order in the Porch!"

SOLOMON: "There be four things which are little upon the earth, but they are exceeding wise."

BALKIS: "Now don't hurry me——"

A very long pause.

BALKIS: "Fish, flesh or fowl?"

SOLOMON: "That's a leading question."

Objection sustained by the recorder. A long pause.

BALKIS: "By me!"

SOLOMON: "The ants are a people not strong, yet they prepare their meat in summer. The conies are but a feeble folk, yet make they their

houses in the rocks. The locusts have no King, yet go they forth all of them by bands. The spider taketh hold with her hands, and is in King's houses."

Applause.

BALKIS: "I guessed it was animals anyway!"

Laughter.

BALKIS: "That's a lovely one, isn't it?"

SOLOMON: "Just a little thing of my own."

Exit Ahishar.

SOLOMON: "My second has two legs, my whole no more, And yet my first alone has always four."

BALKIS: "Now let me think——"

A long pause. Ahishar returns.

BALKIS: "Oh dear, you've got me!"

SOLOMON: "Horse-man."

BALKIS: "Doggone it! You know everything, don't you?"

Laughter.

SOLOMON: "No. There be three things which are too wonderful for me, yea, four which I know not."

BALKIS: "Is it possible! What are they, perhaps I can tell you."

Loud laughter. Suppressed.

BALKIS: "What's funny about that?"

RECORDER: "Order in the Porch. Pass out quietly please."

SOLOMON: "The way of an eagle in the air; the way of a serpent upon a rock; the way of a ship in the midst of the sea; and the way of a man with a maid."

Prolonged applause.

BALKIS: "Oh, that's lovely. I don't know how you do it."

A VOICE: "You tell them, Balkis!"

RECORDER: "Throw that man out."

Scuffle. A spectator is ejected.

BALKIS: "It's too sweet, really!"

SOLOMON: "Just a little thing of my own."

Exit Ahishar.

BALKIS: "You're a wise one, all right all right, I'll tell the world!"

10

And then it was the Queen's turn. Before an audience which packed every available square foot of the Porch she spread out her tablets before her and expounded her riddles, some of which seem to have thrown the meeting into an uproar and greatly incensed Solomon, the more so since his wives insisted on being present and kept up a continuous

babel of recrimination at his failure to make a better showing.

BALKIS: "Ready?"

SOLOMON: "Shoot."

BALKIS: "Why does B come before C in the alphabet?"

A pause.

ICHNEUMON: "Oh, that's easy!"

A pause.

BALKIS: "Can't you guess? Shall I tell you?"

SOLOMON: "Go ahead."

P'SALT: "Quitter!"

BALKIS: "Because a man must be before he can see. I think that's awfully good, don't you?"

SOLOMON: "Slick!"

ICHNEUMON: "Not so good."

BALKIS: "Why is a man sailing up the Tigris River like one putting his father into a sack?"

TCHALK: "Louder and funnier!"

SOLOMON: "Just a moment——"

A pause.

BALKIS: "It's a peach. You'll never guess it."

PSHA: "Chestnut, you mean."

A pause.

BALKIS: "Give it up?"

SOLOMON: "All right, spill it."

PILAFF: "You big bum!"

BALKIS: "Because he is going to Bagdad—see, bag dad?"

Groans. Suppressed. Laughter among the Shebans.

BALKIS: "Got you that time. Here's another."

ICHNEUMON: "Now then, Solomon, on your toes!"

BALKIS: "How many soft-boiled eggs could Goliath eat on an empty stomach?"

PILAFF: "I think that's vulgar."

BALKIS: "Well, what do you say?"

SOLOMON: "Of course he wouldn't have put all his eggs in the same bread basket!"

Cheers from the grand-stand.

P'SALT: "Yeah, Solomon!"

RECORDER: "Answer the question."

SOLOMON: "Seventy times seven."

Applause.

BALKIS: "No, silly! Only one, because after that his stomach wouldn't be empty any longer. That's a good one, isn't it?"

SOLOMON: "Wonderful."

TCHALK: "You poor boob!"

BALKIS: "Why is a mouse like a bale of hay?"

A long pause.

PANORAMA: "Tee hee, tee hee, tee hee——"

SOLOMON: "Shut up!"

A pause.

BALKIS: "Give it up?"

PILAFF: "Certainly not——"

SOLOMON: "All right, why?"

PILAFF: "Good night."

BALKIS: "Because the cattle eat it. See, cat, cattle, it's a play on words."

Uproarious laughter among the Shebans. Loud groans from the spectators. Hoshea is carried out by Abishai and others.

BALKIS: "I think that's a splendid one, don't you?"

PSHA: "Rotten!"

SOLOMON: "Have you very many more like that?"

Laughter. Suppressed.

BALKIS: "Lots. Try this one. Why are seeds, when sown, like gateposts?"

ICHNEUMON: "Come on, Solomon!"

A pause.

BALKIS: "Give it up?"

SOLOMON: Certainly not. Keep still a moment, can't you?"

A pause.

BALKIS: "Give it up, do you?"

SOLOMON: *Expurgated by order of the recorder.*

PANORAMA: "Tee hee, tee—I beg pardon."

SOLOMON: "I know. Because they spring from the ground."

Prolonged applause.

PILAFF: "You can't laugh that off!"

BALKIS: "That's awfully good, of course, but it's not the right answer."

SOLOMON: *Expurgated by order of the recorder.*

ICHNEUMON: *Expurgated by order of the recorder.*

BALKIS: "How dare you speak to me like that?"

PILAFF: *Expurgated by order of the recorder.*

PANORAMA: "Tee hee, tee—ouch, Psha, quit pinching me!"

PSHA: *Expurgated by order of the recorder.*

BALKIS: *Expurgated by order of the recorder.*

SOLOMON: "There's something in what you say."

RECORDER: "Give the answer."

Suspense.

BALKIS: "The right answer is Because they propagate—see, prop a gate."

SOLOMON: "Oy oy!"

Uproar. Three scribes drop dead. Balkis laughs for twenty minutes. Solomon has a fit of apoplexy. Meeting adjourned.

11

And finally the one last riddle of all, which the Queen put to Solomon in private on the evening before her departure for Sheba. The question which had brought her all the way to Jerusalem, and his answer to which she does not ever seem to have understood.

"Why is it," she asked him, "that I who am so beautiful and have had so many suitors cannot find a husband?"

Solomon, so Poteau states, thought for a long while and then made the following reply, couched in terms least calculated to offend his guest, to whom he often referred afterwards as "that asphinxiating woman."

"Queen," he told her. "There's many a slip of the tongue twixt the cup and the lip, and the ear is always more sensitive than the eye."

"I don't get you at all," Balkis complained, "but it sounds awfully clever!"

"Just a little thing of my own," Solomon murmured.

And with this cryptic utterance to ponder over she went from him, loaded with gifts—lead and tin from Tarshish and brass from Tubal, emeralds and cedar and fine linen from Syria, honey and oil from Israel, purple and blue from Eden and Tyre—and returned to her own country.

". . . in what perplexity of mind," to quote Poteau's beautiful passage, "one cannot surmise; leaving behind her such memories as one may not presume to speculate upon. A great and welcome silence descended on Jerusalem, but from the summit of Ophel a glory was departed, over the Valley of Hinnom the smoke of many camp fires was dispersed, in the House of Lebanon a faint aroma floated for many days, and then died.

And on the throne in the Porch of Judgment perhaps one sat who brooded over many things, and came to regret his wisdom. Who knows?"

CHAPTER VIII

OVER THE HOT SANDS

1

Poteau's account ends with that unanswerable question, leaving the reader to seek from other sources the history of the Queen's subsequent career. It is at this point that the student of her life is brought face to face with a baffling perplexity. He turns eagerly to all the authorities on this period, only to find that each of them abandons Balkis at the outset of the return voyage, without a single reference to her homecoming.[1]

Heimweh, who of course denies that she ever undertook the journey, has naturally nothing to say on this point, and closes his chronicle with a report of the death of Shush which seems to have occurred shortly after the conference at Tyre, from which one learns that:

"His discomfiture over the outcome of his carefully laid plans brought on an attack of the blind staggers from which the aged monarch never recovered. For three weeks he lay at Yathil unable

[1] Hornblower, for instance, says simply:

". . . . . she folded her tents and departed, with her cats and her catalogues, her tablets and tabbies. So passed one of the most beautiful figures in history."

to stir a finger, although his mind was active until the end, and then he breathed his last, gently but firmly, in his two hundred and seventy-sixth year.

'This hurts me more than it does you!' were his dying words.

One imagines him lying there recapitulating the events of his inordinately long life, searching through the storehouses of his memory for ever more and more distant recollections—his descendants gathered around him on his one hundredth birthday, and the statues in the gardens at Yathil, and the soft voice of Aida, and the waters of the Red Sea that would not stand aside, and his first jeweled box, and his father's long whiskers, and a gold rattle. . ."

Transom is equally obscure. He devotes long chapters to the political consequences of the Queen's mission, continuing his narrative through decades of Sheban foreign policy, but of Balkis he never breathes a syllable from the time he leaves her at the Ephraim Gate.

This reticence is even more marked in the case of Gorton. He, for his part, extends his secret revelations of the court of Sheba for several volumes, in the introduction to which one is astonished to discover that:

"Soon after her return to Marib, Sophonisba married Shenanikin and, to the great annoyance of all concerned, established a new dynasty which ruled in Sheba for many generations."

But of Balkis never a word, not even of a fictitious nature, and where Gorton is afraid to tread must indeed be perilous ground!

All this is extremely disconcerting.

2

It becomes positively astounding when one looks for a solution of the problem in the writings of Talmud and Shenanikin, and in the Queen's own diaries. For in none of them does one come across the slightest clue which affords any indication of the Queen's fate.

Talmud, one is disappointed to learn, died only a few months after the departure of Balkis for Jerusalem.

Shenanikin, with his customary indifference to his surroundings, does not appear to have been aware of the return of the natives until several months had elapsed, and when he finally does refer to the subject it is only to plunge into rhapsodies over Sophonisba, in the midst of which such unimportant details as the whereabouts of his

sovereign niece seem to have escaped his attention completely.

One turns breathlessly then to the pages of the Queen's diary to be confronted with the fact that the last entry is written somewhere between Ezion and Marib, on the last long stage of the journey which she set out to make entirely by land this time. A quite insignificant entry from which one gathers that the caravan was progressing normally and without any hint of impending mishap.

3

All that one can distill from this conspiracy of silence, therefore, is that she was alive and well at a point approximately midway between Ezion and the borders of Sheba, that her suite arrived in safety at Marib, and that she herself vanished utterly from the scene, no record of the occurrence appearing in any contemporary chronicle.

Such an event is obviously incredible, and for centuries scholars, historians and biographers, irrespective of their assumed indifference arising no doubt from an inability to answer the riddle, have asked themselves the ever pressing question:

"What happened to Balkis?"

The customary explanation of course has always

been that she died of some sudden illness, and, owing to the lack of embalming facilities, was buried under the shifting sands of the desert, the failure of the archives of Sheba to mention the royal demise being charged plausibly enough to existing lapses in the record of this period. So, little by little, the legends have spread broadcast over the universe, shrouding the end of Balkis in veils of impenetrable mystery. Any student of the subject is familiar with the superstitions that cluster around her name—that she sleeps to this day in some secret place and will return in her own appointed time [1]; that once in every hundred years on the night preceding May Day she revisits the earth and appears in human form, the last reported materialization having taken place in 1823 on the Yale Campus, at New Haven, Connecticut.[2]

With such old wives' tales to embellish the issue, with so complete a dearth of historical data, so widespread a failure on the part of scholars to dispel the mystery, the human race might have continued for ever in ignorance of the solution were

[1] A belief which suggests to Steinkopf the origin of the Brunnehilda and Barbarossa myths.

[2] This has been officially denied by the University authorities, but persists, nonetheless, in undergraduate tradition.

it not for some extraordinary discoveries, themselves the fruit of arduous and painstaking labors, here presented to the world for the first time in this work.

"What happened to Balkis?"

Such is the question which has so vexed humanity, and at last now it can be told, and in so doing there is more that must be told.

4

In 1906 the present writer had occasion to spend several weeks in a deserted farmhouse near the fishing village of Beeswax, Maine, while passing through the tedious period of convalescence after a severe attack of temporary insanity. Left to his own resources during the long solitary evenings, he formed the habit of rummaging through the attic, searching for lost wills, hidden documents and rare books such as are not infrequently found in such repositories.

His zeal had already been rewarded by the discovery of a first folio Shakespeare, two hitherto unknown volumes by Benjamin Franklin, and a complete set of the *Bowdoin College Alumni Bulletin* much sought after by collectors, when in moving a large Sheraton sideboard he came

across a heavy little trunk of ancient design, the ponderous iron hinges of which had rusted and fallen apart with age.

Upon inspection, this was found to contain several thousand fragments of torn paper of different sizes and quality, closely covered with faded writing in varying colors of ink, which at a glance was seen to be in monkish Latin by the same hand. As may be imagined, such a find could only appeal as one of absorbing interest to the discoverer who forthwith purchased the farmhouse and all its contents, and set himself to the task of reconstituting the document.

After ten years of unremitting labor, guided by the various colored inks and the different textures of parchment, the writer was able to piece together the manuscript which under his hand took the form of a thick volume several hundred pages in length, the contents of which he then proceeded to translate with such eagerness of spirit as even a layman will no doubt appreciate. Judge of his disappointment, therefore, when after a feverish perusal of the thickly lettered pages the book revealed itself to be merely a school reader, in use probably in some monastic academy, and of interest only to pedagogues as will be seen from the following ex-

tracts chosen at random from the body of the text:

"I have a pig, a little more piggy than other pigs. He has an understanding heart. His name is Aeschilus Aesop Aeneas Epaminondas. He waits patient waits for me at the door and makes joy squeals.

I have a lamb. His name is Genseric Attila Nebuchadnezzar Hannibal. He has needs to be clipped.

Down the road where I do live there are two tall trees. Bohunkus is the name of one, Josephus is the other.

Under the trees there does sit a dog who gives me tremblings. He has not an understanding heart. His name is Tamburlane Appolyon Theodoric Bajazet, and he gives me long crooked looks. . . ."

With a heavy heart the writer, embittered by a decade of fruitless toil, was on the point of sending the manuscript to a Boston magazine, when by the merest chance he came upon a startling discovery. On the margin of the two hundred and thirteenth page unmistakable indications of erasure were observed. A meticulous examination of other margins revealed a similar state of affairs.

The manuscript was unquestionably a palimpsest!

With renewed hope the margins were subjected page by page to all the standard tests, as a result of which it became apparent that the original writing had been done with ink made from the juice of the gall apple, which in turn had been erased with a mixture of milk, cheese and lime. Whereupon the entire volume was washed discreetly with water, and treated with dilute muriatic acid and finally with prussiate of potash.[1]

This task consumed two years, at the end of which a complete manuscript in an unknown tongue had emerged from beneath the superimposed Latin. What long forgotten treasure was now about to be restored to mankind—that was the question!

It was now late in the summer of 1918.

Another year was spent in the identification of this lost language, requiring, as may be imagined, the most searching investigations and comparisons, until success crowned these efforts and it became established beyond a shadow of doubt that the document was in Neurotic, a little known, and entirely extinct, dialect of central Arabia. It then became

[1] *Tinctura Giobertina.*

necessary to acquire a knowledge of Neurotic in order to translate the writing, an undertaking fraught with stupendous difficulties since no grammar of this obscure tongue is available anywhere in the world, the only copy having been possessed by the ill-fated Library of Louvain. But, nothing daunted, the writer persevered and finally, after two more years of unceasing toil, he was in a position to unbar the portals of the secret.

On the very first page the word BALKIS came shining forth from the text like a beacon!

5

Upon careful examination the document so fortuitously rescued from oblivion proved to be the journal of a certain Ptunk, an Egyptian by birth, in the confidential employ of a Bedouin chieftain. The greater part of his writing has to do with the routine matters connected with his service, and is of no immediate concern to readers of this work, much of it, indeed, being taken up with references to his small son, P. 3rd; but at the outset of his chronicle he gives an account of a series of events which solve once and for all, after some three thousand years of perplexity, the mystery concerning the disappearance of Balkis.

Such, no less, is the nature of the material which the present writer is now in a position to set before the public as a result of fifteen years of labor, counting himself amply rewarded in that he should have been chosen by Providence to be the humble instrument whereby this epoch making discovery is presented to mankind.

That portion of the manuscript dealing with Balkis, reproduced herewith for the first time in any language, has been faithfully translated from the original in the possession of the writer, who is prepared to submit the latter for the inspection of experts and learned societies in any part of the world. Those familiar with Neurotic will note at once that the manuscript is in the famous Bes' Tsellar dialect. As can readily be ascertained by comparison, the only alterations in the text consist of sundry emendations, indicated below, which the graphic style of the scribe seemed to render advisable in a work destined for general consumption.

6

The story runs as follows:

"I am Ptunk, the discreet, soft-footed and perfectly trained servant of my Lord, Achmet Ben Tarzan, the Sheik of the Desert.

My Lord is a perfect devil with the women. He is a mixture of well-bred brutality and languid insolence which gets them every time. He is the tallest, broadest, strongest, handsomest, cruellest and most passionate man in Arabia. His word is law. He is utterly pitiless when aroused and shows no mercy. But he has got his at last.

It came to pass that my Lord went on a pilgrimage to Marib to gaze upon the maddening beauty of the Queen, Balkis. From that day forth he spared no effort of his iron will in order to win her for himself, by fair means or foul, preferably foul, for such is his fiery, indomitable Bedouin nature. The Queen, all unconscious of the inexorable fate which lay in store for her, played into his hands. She went on a journey to Jerusalem. The rest was easy.

Months passed, and the Queen's caravan pitched camp on the return journey at an oasis, the precise locality of which my Lord was aware of. He wished to know. It was quite simple.

Night fell and the camp sank to rest; like gaunt, silent shadows my Lord and I gave the sentinels the slip and entered the Queen's tent. With burning eyes my Lord lifted her in his strong arms and placed her in a sack which he had brought with

him. My Lord leaves nothing to chance. Quick as a flash he turned, and with noiseless footsteps retraced his way to the spot where our high-spirited steeds were waiting, unobserved of all.

At this point the Queen, aroused by the fiery pressure of his encircling arms, freed her head from the sack and would have screamed, but before the flaming light of desire which lit up his stern, scornful face the words died on her lips.

'Ha, ha, my proud beauty!' My Lord hissed through half closed eyes, with his usual long, slow, smile. 'You are mine, mine, mine!'

'I heard you the first time,' the Queen gasped hoarsely, and strove desperately to bite his thumb.

'Ha, witch, you would, would you?' My Lord whispered in commanding tones. 'Take that, and that, and that!'

And with a gesture of supreme indifference he sprang lightly into the saddle, crushing her to his heaving breast with one hand while with the other he gave free rein to his frenzied mount. So for nine nights and days we galloped across the desert, forging ahead over the boundless sands, while the Queen, wearied by her futile struggles, lay still and helpless like a puppet, or like some trapped wild thing, in my Lord's iron grasp.

On the evening of the tenth night the palm trees of our beautiful desert home loomed up over the horizon. In a few hours we were dismounting before my Lord's spacious tent and entering the vast apartment fitted with every convenience—and filled with a motley collection of quaint knick-knacks such as he loves to have about him—where, when not in the saddle, he resides in surroundings of mingled barbaric splendor and dignified luxury.

My Lord, laughing softly, pulled the Queen out of the sack by her hair and cast it from him far out into the night. Then with a gesture of careless contempt he flung her onto a pile of soft cushions in a corner of the tent where she lay silently quivering with pent-up emotions, while he gave a few curt orders to his men who stood before him in attitudes of easy grace mingled with respectful deference prepared to obey his slightest wish.

'Who are you?' the Queen asked finally, in subdued accents mixed with pride.

'Who am I—ha ha—I am the Sheik Achmet Ben Tarzan,' my Lord informed her nonchalantly, with a look which stripped the covers off the cushions and left them bare before him.

'What are you going to do to me?' she muttered hoarsely.

'I give you three guesses,' my Lord replied, with another long, low laugh.

The Queen drew herself up to her full height and held herself proudly erect.

'Why have you done this to me, you brute?' she screamed brokenly.

'Why have I done this to you?' my Lord repeated her words with a mocking smile. 'Because I want you. I want what I want when I want it. And now—ha ha—I want you!'

With a few quick steps he was at her side and caught her in his arms, crushing her to him until her ribs cracked. Struggle as she might against his savage embraces she was utterly helpless in his hands which well she knew could have broken her like a toy. Passionately he kissed her lips, her hair, her eyes, her ears, her nose, her neck, her shoulder, her wrist, her elbow and her left foot which had somehow become tangled up in the loose folds of his long flowing robe. Then with a sudden change of mood he let her go, and she fell back onto the cushions with a dull thud.

'Now then, stop your nonsense,' my Lord commanded with a significant scowl. 'And make it snappy!' And, drawing his robe closely about his manly form, he stalked majestically from the tent.

In a few moments he returned, his cruel lips parted in a lingering smile, his eyes half open, half shut, to find that she had not stirred.

'What's the big idea?' he asked with a pitiless laugh. 'Must I wait on you as well as for you?'

Whereupon .....

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.....

During the following weeks I observed that a great change had come over my Lord. At the first he had simply taken the Queen to satisfy a passing fancy, meaning to toss her aside when he had wearied of her, but now he was becoming desperately enamored of her. I, who know him so intimately, could see it in a hundred different ways.

He began, for instance, to treat her with extraordinary brutality mingled with scorn, dragging her around the tent by her hair and maltreating her to his heart's content.

'Kiss me, you little piece of cheese!' he would command through clenched teeth, and when she refused.....

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And the Queen always refused. Roughly as my Lord might handle her she gave him kick for kick and blow for blow, fighting like a tigress against his passionate advances. It is true that she was aided in this by the fact that she was double-jointed, which enabled her to wriggle out of my Lord's grasp at the most unexpected moments.

'Keep still, you little clown!' my Lord hissed savagely on such occasions, but she only laughed bitterly in his face.

'You brute, you beast!' she gasped loudly. 'I hate you, I hate you, I hate you!'

'That's something else again,' my Lord replied with a heavy sigh and went forth and killed three horses with his bare hands.

'What makes you so wild?' she shrilled at him once in the midst of one of their arguments.

'I have catnip in my blood,' my Lord snarled hoarsely. 'That's what makes me wild.'

It was clear to me that this state of affairs could not endure much longer. And, indeed, the end came very shortly. My Lord was in the act one afternoon of throwing a stool at the Queen when,

taking advantage of his upraised arm, she sprang at him with a knife and stabbed him seventeen times.

'You wretch,' she screamed breathlessly. 'Curse you, curse you!'

'I'm stuck for fair!' my Lord gasped throatily and crashed insensible to the floor.

And then an extraordinary thing happened. While I was hastening to my Lord's side to tend his wounds the Queen suddenly pushed me away and fell on her knees beside him, moaning and weeping, and fondling his hand.

'Oh, what have I done?' she murmured brokenly. 'What have I done? Achmet Ben Tarzan, my beautiful Arab, speak to me, speak to me! I didn't know before but I know now, and, oh, the difference to me! Love has come to me at last. You are a lawless savage, a wild night creature, a superb brute, a fierce desert man, and I love you, I love you, I love you!'

'Don't bite the hand that's beating you,' my Lord muttered faintly, and the Queen bowed her head on his breast, sobbing quietly.

Whereupon I retired, knowing as I did that no service of mine could compare with the gentle ministration of loving hands. For three hours my

Lord hovered between life and death, and then his eyes opened slowly and rested upon the Queen's upturned face, beaming with happiness, love and devotion.

'I am yours,' she cried tensely. 'Take me in your strong arms and hold me close, Achmet Ben Tarzan, my beautiful Arab lover—Achmet—my Lord——'

'Maybe I will, and then again maybe I won't,' my Lord whispered sternly, but I, who know him so intimately, saw that all was well with them both."

That section of Ptunk's manuscript directly concerned with Balkis ends at that point. He goes on then to other matters, and there one must leave her, Balkis the Tomboy, Queen of Sheba, become the desert bride of an Arab Sheik; sharing the hardships of his roving life, she who had known the glories of Solomon's court; queening it over his little group of faithful followers, she who had ruled over millions. What did life bring to her of joy and sorrow, of security and strife, of prosperity and ill-fortune—that no one will ever know.

One last question, however, arises as one prepares to close the chronicle of her days. How was it that the Arab chieftain whose wife she became was

able to accommodate himself to that defect which had hitherto driven all men away from her?

The answer is found in a brief sentence of Ptunk's subsequent narrative.

"My Lord, Achmet Ben Tarzan," he states, "was very nearly stone deaf, and became entirely so shortly after his marriage with Balkis.

Fortunate man. . . ."

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